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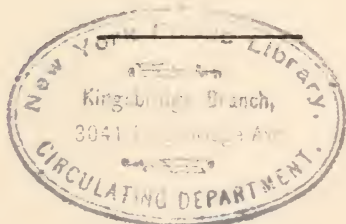
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BY

SOPHIE MAY

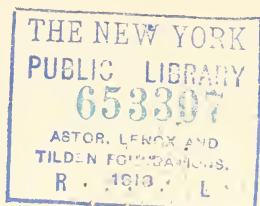
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TO

MY FRIEND

FRANCES LEE PRATT

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JANET.

CHAPTER I.

HER HOME.

“**D**AUGHTER, where’s my bonnet?”

Mrs. Vail might well ask: for horses and driver waited at the gate; and her husband stood at the hall-door, hat in hand, — a man who could not abide delays.

“Dear me, mamma, *I* don’t know where your bonnet is. When did you wear it last?” returned Miss Janet from the depths of a pile of laces.

Pretty, dainty, little Mrs. Vail looked aggrieved. She had assumed one great burden in life, — the charge of her very intricate nervous system, — and it did seem unreasonable to expect her at the same time to have the care of her clothes.

“Janet!” exclaimed Mr. Vail, turning upon his daughter indignantly, “why do you make this interruption? *You* ought to know where your poor sick mother’s things are. Go find them at once!”

He was a tall, slight, fair-haired man, one of those highly wrought, unquiet people, commonly described as “hung on wires.” You could see at a glance that his

nervousness was of the true ingrain sort, compared with which his wife's mild hypochondria was as restful as a summer sea.

"Come, Hattie, my love," said he, dropping his voice to a tender key, "sit down here, and let me draw on your overshoes."

"Oh, yes; that's always the way!" thought Janet, as she sped up the broad staircase: "he is so absurd about mamma! As if I could stand guard over her bonnet every minute, when, for aught I know, she may have dropped it into the fire!"

The bonnet was found at last, in the hall-closet, crushed behind a pair of boots.

"O what a fright! Your papa will be ashamed to ride with me," laughed Mrs. Vail, seizing the dilapidated ruin, and giving it a few deft touches, when, behold, it blossomed out upon her head as airily as ever, as if it loved its post of honor near that charming face.

"There you are, Hattie! Your bonnets are like good travellers; knocking about only takes the stiffness out of them," said Mr. Vail, looking proudly down at the beautiful being, as he drew out his own silk handkerchief and brushed her velvet cloak.

But he was still displeased with his daughter.

"I see," said he, his quick eye roving to the laces she had tossed into the tall work-basket in the corner, "your mind is so full of that Milliken party that you haven't room for another idea. How often shall I remind you, Janet, that your first duty is to your mother? But what do you care for your duty? You are growing up idle and selfish, without any gratitude to the parents who have done so much for you."

He spoke in an imperious tone, which brought the quick blood to the girl's cheeks.

"Oh, don't, papa! how can you?" cried she. "Why will you be always blaming me so?"

"Oh, fie, my dears!" broke in the peace-loving, soft-voiced wife and mother. "Come, Rufie, my love, don't let me keep you waiting another minute. I'll be ready sooner next time."

"But is he fair to condemn me without a hearing, mamma?" cried Janet as Mrs. Vail waved a merry adieu.

"Have that trumpery out of the way before we get back, Janet," said Mr. Vail, turning his head with another withering glance at the laces.

He had a restless, keen blue eye; and when he was displeased, it could be as icy as the cold, sharp sword of romance, that froze the wounds it inflicted. A black eye may blaze more fiercely, but no eye chills like a blue one.

"I wish he knew those horrid laces are all hers. Why didn't she tell him so? And to accuse me of caring too much for dress, when every day of my life he scolds me for not caring enough!" thought Janet, pacing the floor with head erect and flashing eyes, and almost the step of a queen.

"O father! you're an inconsistent, supercilious, unreasonable man. There, I will say it to myself for once, and free my mind. You never see but one side of a story, and that's mother's side. Once you loved me, or I thought so, in the days when I was a little, happy girl. Mother would say you love me still, only your nerves are getting worn out. Nerves, indeed!

Now, that's mother's sweet way of putting things ; but she knows in her heart that you are growing bitter and harsh. She knows you are ruining my temper, and alienating my love : and she pities me, but she won't say so ; she's too loyal, too good. Ah, here she comes back again ! ”

“ What do you think ! ” whispered Mrs. Vail, rushing in breathless. “ I don't want papa Vail to hear, but we've had the narrowest escape ” —

“ Oh ! did the horses run away ? ”

“ No, no ! it's about the lunch : I never dreamed papa would be here, and perhaps Theresa will put mace in the oysters. So lucky I happened to remember ! Run and stop her ! ”

“ Is that all ? ”

“ Why, he can't abide mace ! If she has got the oysters in, tell her to take them out and get something else, — but speak gently, don't vex her, — some nice little dish that papa will fancy. Oh, my dear ! how could you have spoken to him as you did just now ? ”

“ Because, mamma, he was unjust. I had borne a long lecture at breakfast, but this was too much. ”

“ O Janet, Janet, calm yourself ! When we come back, let papa Vail see you are sorry for this, ” said the graceful lady, gliding away in haste. She knew her husband was entirely in the wrong, but not for worlds would she have dared to tell him so. It was easier to blame her daughter, and gentle Mrs. Vail always chose the easier way.

“ A strange day for a ride, ” thought Janet as she delivered her message to the cook, and went to the front door to look out.

It was a Saturday morning in early March, and a white mist brooded tenderly over the earth. In Mr. Vail's front yard the dead rose-trees clung to their trellises, awaiting the touch of spring as the Sleeping Beauty waited for her prince. A few shrubs and climbers stood stiffly about in their winter wraps of straw and burlap, but so glorified by the dense fog that they looked almost like marble statues; and the iron fence seemed vaguely remote, as if it might be the very end of the world.

"If I were going to write a story," said Janet to herself, "I think I should begin it in a mist; for life is just like this, — it's all a mystery from first to last. Looking backward you can't see the beginning, and looking forward you can't see the end."

And with a little sigh she closed the door, passed by Lavinia, who was oiling the front stairs, and entered the "story-room."

This was really one of the front parlors; but Mrs. Vail had filled it with large paintings illustrating scenes from German fairy-tales, and was now urgent that it should be called the "story-room." It is true the gentle lady had never read a line of German; but for all that, Aschenbroedel, Dornroschen, and others of that immortal race smiled down upon her from the walls as blandly as if she were the greatest scholar in the land. Not an inch of space had been wasted. The tiles about the fireplace were crowded with brownies, elves, and goblins; and the same unearthly creatures, of all shapes and sizes, were dancing in bass-relief overhead. You would say it was a room to dream in, and forget the cares of the world: but it must be remarked that Janet,

the eldest of the family, had little leisure for dreaming ; which was quite as well, perhaps, since she was naturally introspective, given to thought rather than to observation. Her father, however, like a sleepless sentinel, kept her always mindful of her duty. It was not enough that she should be a hard student at school : she must also make good all her invalid mother's deficiencies at home, or suffer the reproach of his eagle eye and whip-like tongue.

She proceeded now to set the story-room in order, preparatory to his coming back to lunch. The deep, luxurious sofa was piled with shawls and bric-à-brac, the carpet strewn with books and magazines ; while the cat, like a white-robed queen, had enthroned herself in an easy-chair upon an elegant velvet dress, and Mrs. Vail's costly lace handkerchief and gold vinaigrette lay on the rug near the shovel and tongs.

"Mamma can't stay in a room half an hour but there follows a strange riot with the furniture," thought Janet, smiling ; and she had just succeeded in setting things to rights when the lady-mother appeared, evidently quite depressed by her ride.

"We met cousin Brenda Harlow, and drove her with us to the park ; and after that your father made Payson leave him at the ferry, for he couldn't stop to come home to lunch."

Janet took off her mother's wraps, and disposed her comfortably upon the sofa.

"Is there any thing I can do for you?" said she, drawing up a hassock, and seating herself beside the tearful lady.

"Yes : talk to me, daughter. Amuse me. Change

the current of my thoughts: that's what Dr. Devol recommends. My heart is throbbing strangely: do you suppose those drops can have lost their effect? And my head aches too."

"Poor little mother! sha'n't I bathe it?"

Janet started meekly for a basin of water, into which she dropped a little ammonia. It seemed to her, as she pressed the sponge to her mother's aching temples, that one-half her life had been spent in the performance of this very duty. Her father might criticise her in other respects, but as a headache-nurse she was without fear and without reproach.

"Daughter dear, you look sad. Tell mamma what has gone wrong."

"Why, how uninteresting that would be!" said Janet, forcing a smile: "I thought you wanted to be amused."

"Now, child, you are not grieving over what papa Vail said just now? Or was it those few thoughtless words at the breakfast-table? You *were* a little awkward in spilling your coffee. You don't mind papa Vail, do you, when he is out of sorts?" said Mrs. Vail, in low, timid, almost pleading tones.

Janet's brows contracted. Instead of "a few thoughtless words," she had listened to a half-hour's tirade, beginning with "One would take you for a country milkmaid, child;" and ending — In truth, it had not ended yet. That was the worst of papa Vail's morning lectures: they never came to a full stop. He was trying the heroic treatment with his daughter, — all blame and no praise, — and she was getting disheartened; but how could she say this to the dear little

mother, whose tremulous spirits were so easily thrown out of balance? Mrs. Vail was really too tender-hearted to bear a feather's-weight of other people's troubles.

"Don't tell me, child, it's what papa Vail said this morning."

"Why should it be?" returned Janet evasively. "What has he said this morning that he has not said a thousand times before? There, there, mamma! lie still, and go to sleep."

Mrs. Vail looked relieved.

"I'm glad you're becoming such a philosopher, my precious child. I was just a little afraid, do you know, that you did mind it, — especially about the milk-maid, — and were feeling aggrieved."

"Mamma, will you have the afghan over your shoulders?"

"Yes, over the left one, — so. It's papa's constant strain of business that wears on his nerves, daughter; and we'll forgive him, won't we, if he frets a little now and then? Only think, if his brains *should* soften like Mr. Milliken's. Dr. Devol says" —

"Oh, fie, mamma! father's brains are hard as a rock. There, close your eyes, and let me bathe them with a sponge. How do they happen to be so much like Tim's when he is only your half-brother?"

"Why, Tim is a Braxton, and so am I."

"Yes, and so are the children. I wish I could have been a Braxton too: it's a great privilege," said Janet playfully. "Now I'm nobody in particular, for certainly papa wouldn't own me as a Vail; so I might as well accept the fact that I'm the 'odd one of the family.'"

CHAPTER II.

MR. BRAXTON.

“**I** FEEL pulverized,” sighed Janet to herself one morning. “Papa Vail hasn’t left any thing of me this time but dust and ashes.” And, still smarting at some of his remembered words, she gazed mournfully and inquiringly into the large pier-glass which occupied the entire space between the west windows of the “story-room.” The glass gave back the reflection of a large, thoughtful-looking, auburn-haired girl of nearly seventeen, with little especial beauty except the comeliness of youth, and no grace of manner beyond a certain well-bred air which would naturally be acquired by moving always in good society.

“Great, awkward, red-haired girl, I’m ashamed of you!” said she, shaking her finger disdainfully at her own image.

“‘What thou seest, what there thou seest, fair creature, is thyself,’” said a laughing voice just behind her; and turning, she met the gaze of her young friend and comrade, uncle Timothy Braxton.

“Oh! is that you, Tim? I was bemoaning my red hair.”

Mr. Braxton shrugged his shoulders, and looked admiringly at Janet’s abundant tresses, tinged with half

a dozen different shades, varying from golden brown to richest auburn. The color was rare and beautiful, but Tim was a young man who never flattered.

“ Well, Janey, you do well to moan ; but only think how lucky that you were not born an ancient Egyptian ! ”

“ I suppose that is a very sage remark,” said Janet, wiping her eyes stealthily ; “ but I don’t see the force of it.”

“ Why, the Egyptians had an unpleasant habit of sacrificing their red-haired girls to—well, we’ll call him the imp of darkness.”

“ Did they? I didn’t know they were so sensible. I wish I had been a sheik’s daughter about five thousand years ago.”

“ That’s a cheerful remark for a young heiress,” said Tim, wheeling about in his military march. “ By the way, have you seen any thing of the gloves I left here yesterday? — Tired of life, are you? ”

“ Here are the gloves, you careless creature ! You are almost as bad as mother. — No, I’m not tired of life ; only a little tired of myself. Did you ever feel so, Tim,—as if you’d like to be somebody else, just for a change? ”

“ Y-e-es, self is a tiresome individual,” said he, regarding her coolly, though his heart swelled with indignation.

Patience is not a *young* virtue, and he had hardly attained it as yet. “ Poor thing ! ” thought he, “ her father has been scolding her. Wasn’t I Rufus Vail’s clerk for three years? and don’t I remember the ‘ crushing process ’? ”

“After all, Tim, perhaps it’s the money I’m tired of. Seems to me, if I could only go back and live in that old house where I was born, I’d be happy again.”

“That brown cottage on the corner-lot, eh? You’re an ambitious girl.”

“Yes. Wasn’t it pleasant there, with the elm-trees in front, and that little strip of garden at one side?”

“Well, come here, Janey, and let’s talk this thing over,” said Mr. Braxton, seating himself before the fire, and opening the paper he held in his hand, — the ground-plan of a house. He was an architect.

“Here is a cottage I’m devising for a pair of married lovers. Shall I put in a bay-window to the south?”

“No; to the west, where they can see the sun set. Won’t it be charming? I do like a small house, Tim, that you can shut up when you please, and put in your pocket; not a great Russian ice-palace, like this!”

Tim ran his fingers through his hair.

“So you want me to believe you’re not as happy as you used to be? Absurd!”

He spoke in a railing tone, though with a glance of the loveliest pity, which fell straight down on the paper where Janet did not see it. Then he began to scribble, and quite spoiled the plan of the house.

“Why, of course I’m not as happy, Tim. People lose their light-heartedness as they grow older, don’t they? They think more and feel more; and you know, the more you think and feel, the sadder you are.”

“Indeed, this is all news to me! I’ve been thinking and feeling for twenty-six years, and actually thought I enjoyed it!”

“Oh, yes! you’re not a girl! Still, I suppose girls are happy if they think rightly, and don’t get all in a maze, and if they feel only a little and not too much, and their feelings don’t get wounded. I mean, if they don’t mind their being wounded — that is” —

Here, becoming hopelessly entangled, she blushed, stopped short, and turned away her head.

“‘Very clear, lucid, and ambiguous,’ as the old lady remarked,” said Tim, fixing his eyes on Janet with a questioning glance.

They were beautiful eyes, like his sister’s, — of a deep blue-gray, so heavily shaded by dark lashes, and bushy, projecting eyebrows, that they easily passed for black. They were remarkable for their kindly expression; but Tim’s manner had always a touch of raillery, as if he despised softness, and would fain pass for a stoic of the first degree.

“I’m afraid you’ve been preternaturally wicked, Janey, or you wouldn’t feel so melancholy this morning.”

“I can’t find the diamond ear-ring that mother lost, if you call that wicked. Father calls it so, but he never blames mother for any thing,” said Janet, her eyes shining through sudden dews.

“Poor Hattie! Thank Heaven he is kind to *her*!” muttered Mr. Braxton between his teeth; and Janet felt a twinge of shame for having called forth the remark.

She never complained to Tim of her father, knowing the two men were far from friendly. There was no open hostility; but they stood on an intensely polite footing, addressing each other as “Mr. Braxton” and

“Mr. Vail.” Tim never called when his brother-in-law was at home, and Mr. Vail’s entering the house was usually the signal for Tim’s leaving it. Janet hastened to change the subject.

“Yes, as I was saying, Tim, money is at the root of all my troubles; for if father hadn’t grown rich we shouldn’t have left that dear little cottage on Nostrand Avenue.”

“Well, you *are* an unlucky girl to rise in the world! But it might have been worse, Janey: your father might have bought a much finer mansion than this, and kept three times as many servants, — he is amply able, — and what would have become of you then?”

“Now, you needn’t make light of it, Tim! We were the happiest family in Brooklyn when we lived on the avenue. Father and mother hadn’t any nerves in those days; and we kept only one servant; and mother made the bread with her own hands, while under the pantry-window her little calico-clad daughter moulded mud-pies. There! doesn’t that sound like a story?”

“And wasn’t there a big boy somewhere about, with leather shoes and a hoe?”

“Yes, you may be sure of that. You were a great trial, Tim. How you did tease me! But the moment I cried, you always went down on your knees, and wiped my eyes, and promised me every thing in the world if I’d only cheer up. I envy that chubby little girl in her soiled apron and torn frock, — I do truly. Nobody dreamed then of her ever becoming a fine lady; nobody expected her to be graceful, and talk French with a good accent. If she obeyed her parents, and got a card at school, it was all that was required of her,”

sighed Janet, looking fixedly into the red heart of the fire.

“Go on,” said Tim: “I always liked that little girl. She carried a music-box in her head, just as they say a little brown toad carries a jewel, and just as unconsciously.”

“Oh! she never was much of a singer, Tim. She could sing a little, to be sure; but in all other respects she was a very commonplace child. She sang because she could not help it. She did not know her voice would have to be trained by great masters till her throat ached. She did not know she was fated to strive always, yet never become a respectable singer.”

Janet spoke in a musing tone, a sweet lingering contralto, that fell pleasantly on the ear. Tim looked at her in unfeigned surprise. Had she no appreciation of her own gifts? Had constant fault-finding destroyed the last vestige of her self-esteem?

“Well, Janey, you have developed great humility, I must say, for an infant prodigy who used to be taken out of bed at six years of age to sing before company. Do you remember that?”

“Oh, yes!” said Janet with animation. “Papa had the girl dress me nicely, and curl my hair; and after I had sung, and everybody had kissed me, he marched me off on his shoulders in triumph.”

“A pretty way to spoil a baby,” muttered Tim.

Janet looked as if she found it an easy thing to forgive.

“O Tim, papa Vail was so proud of me then! Don’t you know what a droll way he had of saying, ‘Jennie’s the drop o’ me heart’? And *do* you re-

member the walks we took on Saturday afternoons, you and mother and papa and I, and sometimes cousin Brenda Harlow? and how we carried a picnic-basket, and feasted under the trees? Papa waited on me himself, and told me the most charming fairy-stories out of his own head, such as I've never read in books."

"Your father is remarkably fond of little children, and has great facility for amusing them," suggested Tim.

"What a pity I ever grew up!" thought Janet. "And, Tim, do you remember how you used to tease me to call you uncle?"

"Did I? I must have felt patriarchal," said the young man, flinging back his hair with an impatient gesture.

"But, Tim, you *are* my uncle: it's of no use denying it. And let me see: there's a tiny bald spot on the top of your head,—yes, there certainly is; and I'm going to begin to call you uncle to-morrow."

A flush mounted to Mr. Braxton's forehead.

"Uncle, indeed! Call me grandfather, but uncle I won't be to any girl of your size! Come, this is a digression. Go on with your reminiscences."

"Well, then, there was my dear grandmother, who died; and aunt Rossy, who didn't die, but has lain in that white bed at your house ever since I can remember, smiling as if some great good thing had happened to her. To think of your having the care of that sick woman, who is not a relative of yours at all! keeping house, and doing every thing for her, when we are the ones who should take her, for she is mother's own aunt."

This speech went straight to the point. As Rufus Vail would not do his manifest duty, and provide a home for the stricken Mrs. Prentiss, the burden had fallen on Timothy Braxton, who was a struggling young man, not yet well established in his profession. But Tim had never been heard to complain.

"Relationship isn't every thing," said he now to Janey; "and I have more reason than your mother has to love aunt Rossy, for she took care of me when I was an infant. I am twenty years younger than your mother," added he emphatically.

"Yes, I know, and you're a saint, a perfect, down-right saint!" cried Janet, in a sudden little enthusiastic parenthesis. "The way you lift and tend aunt Rossy is wonderful. There's nothing you wouldn't do for her. Why, I suppose if you had father's money you'd be sending her to a Swiss air-cure the very first thing!"

"Which would blow her entirely away, to begin with."

"Oh, well! then you wouldn't; but cousin Brenda Harlow says — There, I was going to ask about Brenda."

"To ask what relation she is?" laughed Tim. "When you begin to climb the genealogical tree, Janey, it's fearful! Brenda Harlow is my own cousin, and your mother's own cousin: her mother was a Braxton."

"I know that, and I don't care whose cousin she is. I was only going to ask why she stays at your house, and doesn't come to see us? Always before this, when she has visited Brooklyn, she has divided her time

between the two houses ; but now we never get her at all, or only by little snatches, and papa wonders what it means."

It meant that Miss Harlow found Rufus Vail intolerable ; but, as Tim could not say this to the daughter, he merely whistled, and remarked that "he mustn't stay dillydallying here any longer."

After he was gone Janet picked up the paper he had been scribbling on, and caught the words, —

"Poor Janey!" "Poor Janey!" "Uncle Tim!" "Grandfather Tim!" "How preposterous!" and various other disjointed sentences, which quite obliterated the plan of the cottage ; but she laid the sheet away in her desk till called for, saying with a smile, —

"I don't know what Tim or mother would either of them do without me to take care of their loose property. The Braxtons are a heedless family: I've learned genealogy enough for that!"

As Mr. Braxton left Mr. Vail's gate, he met a bright little lady skipping daintily toward him. In figure and features she somewhat resembled his sister, but not in complexion or manner. Mrs. Vail was a languid brunette ; Miss Harlow, exactly her age, a blonde, and so gracefully alert and agile that Tim had saucily remarked of her that she was "frisking along toward fifty."

"Can't you stop a minute, cousin Brenda?"

"Certainly," replied she, with a smile which revealed her even white teeth and solitary dimple. So she turned, and they walked on together.

"I want to talk to you about Janey."

"Yes, I know. But we're utterly powerless, Tim: we can't even express our pity, for fear of wounding

her pride. Rufus Vail has a great deal to answer for," pursued Miss Harlow, darting, as usual, from one sentence into another, and stopping in the middle to take breath.

"Well, Brenda, I was just wondering what effect it would have if you should go there a few days. I don't want to give you up, but I'm sure it would be a comfort to Janey."

"Why, my boy, you don't know what you ask. I'm not a patient woman; and if I should sit at Rufus Vail's table, and hear one of his lectures, I should fly out at him before I knew it."

"The wretch! But he likes you, Brenda: he wouldn't harangue so in your presence."

"Ah, but he would! He is losing his self-control more and more, Tim. I see a great change in that regard since I was here last spring. He still behaves beautifully before strangers; but if I should stay in the house two days, he would drop all reserve, and that would be so trying to Hattie!"

"Perhaps you are right: Hattie is proud; but something ought to be done for Janey. He is withering that young girl's life like a frost in June; he is breaking her heart," said Tim, in a choked voice, while the tears sprang to his eyes.

"There, there; don't fret, my boy!" said the little spinster, patting his square shoulders. "Things can't go on in this way forever."

"No: 'this way madness lies' — for somebody — which is it?" said strong, hopeful cousin Tim, who would have scorned to speak despondently before almost any other being but Brenda Harlow.

She was such a sunny woman, that I fear people had a way of turning the dark side of a question toward her in order to have it shone upon, feeling instinctively that it is a pity to have any sunshine wasted.

“I have a bright idea, Tim. Suppose I beg leave of the head of the family to take Janet home with me for a visit?”

“Capital! If there’s anybody that can prevail with Rufus, it is you,” said Tim; and the two “friends in council” shook hands and parted.

CHAPTER III.

MISS HARLOW.

TIMOTHY BRAXTON'S cottage, two blocks from Mr. Vail's house, was a haven of rest for Janet. There she was always sure of finding peaceful aunt Rossy Prentiss, who was a bond-slave to rheumatism of the joints, and almost as fixed in her white bed as the statue of the Virgin Mary in her shrine. No hope being left the sufferer in this present evil world, she looked constantly upward toward her heavenly rest, till it seemed sometimes as if she radiated light from the unseen shore. But aunt Rossy "wist not that her face shone."

"How do you do, Jenny?" said she, beaming upon Janet as the young girl entered her room one Saturday morning, unannounced.

She lived in the back parlor, — the very heart of the house: and when the folding-doors stood open, visitors were free to walk in; when closed, it was understood that Mrs. Prentiss was suffering, and preferred to be alone.

"Take that chair, dear. Brenda has gone out for a few moments, but didn't she arrange your violets beautifully?" said aunt Rossy, looking at the vase on the mantle as if she expected to see a group of angels emerging from it.

It was a lovely room, — gray and scarlet and white, well decorated now with bittersweet berries and pampas grass, and lively with a colony of crickets chirping in the fernery.

“How beautiful it is here, — how restful!” said Janet, for whom there was a charm even in the cross-barred lights and shadows cast by the double windows.

“Yes. Timothy has every thing as he likes it,” smiled aunt Rossy. But surely every thing was as she liked it too. Never was such a magazine of comforts as the stand beside the bed, with its little pitcher of unfailing lemonade, its mug of perennial creamy coffee, its boxes and phials without end; not to mention the little lever clock, which balanced itself on its slender legs like a dwarf auctioneer, and told how the minutes were “going, going, going,” as if that were the jolliest news in the world.

Heavenly-minded aunt Rossy was not very observing; but so marked was Janet’s sadness to-day, that she asked presently, —

“Has any thing happened, my dear? Come and tell auntie all about it.”

“Oh, it’s nothing! I’m ashamed — a strong girl like me — ashamed to have an impatient thought, when I look at you, lying there so white and still, and never speaking of your dreadful pain. But mayn’t I take your hand, auntie, and lay it on my head? There, now! Won’t you please say something good and strong to me, — something on purpose for me to carry away and remember? I wish you would, auntie.”

“My dear,” said the gentle old lady, with a yearning smile, “I don’t know what trials you may have;

but here are four little words that will suit any case :
‘ Walk in the light.’ ”

A faint glow overspread Janet’s face.

“ Yes. I’ve thought of that, and wished I could ; but there doesn’t seem to be any light, auntie. I wonder where it is.”

“ Ah ! my dear, that is what the little plant wondered that lived — in — the — cellar.”

The last words were forced out painfully, with a look toward the folding-doors, which meant that aunt Rossy was suffering from one of her paroxysms, and chose to be alone. Janet stole out, and seated herself upon the *tête-à-tête* in the front parlor. Every thing was quiet. The maid-of-all-work, Mary Mulligan, trod the kitchen as if shod in velvet, and aunt Rossy herself was noiseless through all her pain.

“ Tim is a noble fellow,” mused Janet, “ to convert his house into a hospital ; but blessed aunt Rossy is doing him more good than he dreams. Why, time was when Timothy Braxton was no better than I am. I can remember ” —

“ Good-morning, dear,” said Brenda Harlow, walking airily into the room. “ Here are my photographs, at last.”

“ Photographs ? ” asked Janet, with the manner of one in a reverie.

“ Yes. Want to see them ? ” added the bright little lady, tossing a package into the lap of the dreamer, who neither looked up nor stirred. Miss Harlow rushed upon her with a pin.

“ Oh ! you *are* alive,” laughed she, as Janet screamed.
“ Look at them, then, and give your opinion. Indians

object to sitting for a likeness, because it takes something out of their lives, they say; and I fancy they are right, for my pictures always have a half-dead look."

Janet roused herself sufficiently to scowl.

"Respectable, just respectable," said she, scanning the cards; "but, Brenda Harlow, why will you always and forever dress in gray? It's lovely out of the picture, and adds to your dovelike appearance, but" —

"Any reference to Noah's dove?"

"No, ma'am; but you needn't beg for a compliment. All I'll say is this: the photograph is twenty years older than you are, and not half so pretty; and your beautiful soft hair has no color at all."

Miss Harlow laughed, and perched herself on the sofa-arm to peep over Janet's shoulder.

"Flatterer! The wig-makers assert that my 'beautiful soft hair' is 'on the mouse'; but you call it *blonde cendrée*, I believe. And as for age, you forget I am nearly forty-six; and I declare, I usually forget it myself. My life has been hurried along so fast that some of the years haven't seemed to count. Why, I don't feel any older this minute than you do, Janet Vail."

As she spoke, laughing, and catching her breath, she sprang up to set a vase straight on a bracket, and to listen at the door for some sign from aunt Rossy.

"Cousin Brenda, there on the middle of the table lies my album that Tim pilfered. Please bring it to me, now you're up. I've selected the best of your pictures to put in it."

"What assurance!" said Miss Harlow; but she brought the album. "Ah! here's your mother," said

she, turning the leaves ; “ but her vinaigrette is conspicuous by its absence : she ought to have been taken with that in her hand.”

“ Well, she was taken hunting for it, which is still more natural. My beautiful, dark-haired mother : if I could only have looked like her ! ” said Janet, half to herself.

“ Your father is of quite another type,” remarked Miss Harlow : “ light hair, high forehead, small, business-like, restless eyes, that seem even here to be moving.”

Janet turned the leaf quickly, as if to avoid meeting those ubiquitous eyes.

“ By the way, what’s the color of mine ? ”

“ Open them wide. Indian-red ; no, winey-brown ; well, hazel.”

“ Yes, hazel eyes, red hair ; and it seems the family nose wasn’t good enough for me, but I must needs go and have mine after another pattern,” said Janet jocosely ; though as she spoke a tear trickled down her cheek, and glistened on the back of her hand. “ Oh, fie ! I’m not crying, but this spring weather is so depressing ! Why, cousin Brenda, you know I have every thing to make me happy,” continued Janet, letting fall a second briny drop quite unexpectedly. “ No end of money. Everybody envies me, and I try to be thankful, — I mean, thankful for the money.”

Another tear, probably of gratitude.

“ You poor thing,” thought Miss Harlow, stroking the young girl’s hair with her small fingers : “ who could envy you, that knows ? ”

“ It’s beautiful to live in luxury ; but I’m afraid I

don't appreciate it, cousin Brenda. I never did care for fine dress, and fashion: I'm very plebeian in my tastes, father says."

"Yes, I know," returned Miss Harlow, making a wry face surreptitiously.

"Such things are thrown away upon me. I have a sort of nonsensical feeling now and then, that there isn't any place for me in the world, and it was a great mistake my being born. Do you ever get dismal in that way, cousin Brenda? Of course not: why do I ask?"

A shade crossed Miss Harlow's bright face, but was gone in a moment.

"To say the truth, dear, I really can't afford to be dismal. My life is more than half gone already, and I must hasten to make the most of what is left."

Janet smiled, as people always did whenever this bright little lady alluded to the possibility of growing old.

"Well, you don't waste much time, I should say; coming here an invalid, and writing for dear life all the while."

"Not an invalid, child: only troubled with a slight cough this winter, and afraid of the Boston east winds. And as for writing, I must meet my engagements, or it would fare hard with my purse," admitted Miss Harlow reluctantly. "But I'm going home next week, for brother Edward is getting impatient."

"How long have you two lived together, cousin Brenda?"

"By ourselves, do you mean? Twelve happy years, my dear. We are the last of our family, you know,

and all in all to each other. He overlooks my little peculiarities, and I overlook his; and perhaps that is the secret of our happy home."

The words smote Janet. Yes, it was, and ought to be, a happy home: Miss Harlow had educated her younger brother by the labor of her pen, and he repaid this long devotion by the tenderest love. Surely Janet did not envy Brenda and Edward; but she sighed involuntarily, as she crushed the tassel of the window-shade between her fingers.

"You dear, proud, patient soul!" thought Miss Harlow. "I'll take you home with me if I can, and put a different look into your face."

CHAPTER IV.

SPECIAL PLEADING.

MISS HARLOW “preened her plumage” that evening, and dropped in at the Vail mansion to do a little special pleading for Janet.

“I hope I can keep my temper,” thought she. But dining with Rufus Vail was a dreaded ordeal. It was painful to see how greatly matters had changed for the worse within a year. Fourteen hours, every day, of brain-work and eager grasping after the “main chance,” were fast telling upon the highly wrought, ambitious man of business.

Janet’s fear of her father seemed to amount to stage-fright. She could not cross the room in his presence without craning her neck, walking as if her feet were clogged, and hastening to hide in a corner.

“So much for the lectures on plebeian manners,” thought Miss Harlow indignantly. “I’d like to say to her, as the angel said to Adam, —

“Ofttimes
Naught profits more than self-esteem.”

Mr. Vail had a morbid horror of the plebeian, and for very good reason. Born in a small town in Vermont, he had never had what his rural neighbors

termed. "any kind of bringing-up;" and such men, if they afterwards prosper in life, are great sticklers for behavior. He had overcome all his early disadvantages, and prided himself now on his fine deportment. It was fine, no doubt, only there was too much of it. As a host he was all that could be desired, and, Miss Harlow thought, a great deal more.

At dinner he not only rained, but poured, small attentions upon his guest, while his wife sat like a lay figure listening to his harangues. Miss Harlow remembered how charmingly Mrs. Vail had once presided at her own table, and said to herself, —

"If I were Hattie, I would never endure it. Is she afraid of Rufus? I begin to think so. His 'nervousness,' as he calls it, amounts almost to insanity; and if she crosses him she will rue the day, like Janet. — And there goes Bertha!"

Mr. Vail was ordering the pretty little creature, his pride and darling, away from the table, because, with a sudden affectionate impulse, she had put up her small, gravy-stained lips to kiss Miss Harlow.

"Ah! cousin Brenda, this is indeed a pleasure," said the host, as he seated himself beside the little lady on the music-room sofa, after dinner. "When have you and I had any rational conversation? You hardly ever drop in socially of an evening when you know I am at home, and could enjoy your society. — Janet, my daughter, play some of your sonatas while Miss Harlow and I are talking. — She certainly sweeps the keys with a sense of power. I like to see her assume that regal air," he added in a lower tone.

"Assume!" thought Miss Harlow. "Janet is in-

capable of assuming.” But she let him go on without interruption.

“I don’t mind saying to you confidentially that Janet is a superior girl, cousin Brenda. It must be admitted she has intellect, and that is what I admire in a woman,” — bowing low to the literary lady, who tapped her foot, and thought, “Oh, what a story!” — “though I own it *would* gratify me to see her take polish a little more readily.”

Here Miss Harlow improved a pause by saying that Janet had “the great charm of genuineness.”

“So she has! so she has! I particularly note that quality, and admire it,” said Mr. Vail, anxious to agree with his companion. “I would prefer more polish, but I dislike conventionality. I abhor it, and wouldn’t on any account have Janet copy the fashionable girls of the period, — all cut out after one pattern.”

“Yes, you would: it’s just what you’re trying to have her do,” mused Miss Harlow.

“She is a dear child, cousin Brenda; and all I ask is to see her as happy as she is good.”

“Rufus Vail, how can you be such a hypocrite?” thought the little spinster, losing her patience, and striking in abruptly, —

“So you perceive she is not happy?”

“Not happy? — my dear little daughter?”

He seemed disturbed. Brenda coughed: she had a convenient little cough, which covered a multitude of emotions, and often seized her when for any reason she chose not to express her mind on a subject, or wished to gain time to reflect.

"Perhaps I should have said morbid," she went on courageously.

"Studying too hard: it must be stopped," said the wiry gentleman, moving uneasily. "Why, cousin Brenda, we are living at high pressure: it's a nervous age. We shall all lose our reason if we don't take care. *My* head has a wild feeling half the time."

"You ought to rest entirely, Mr. Vail" (Miss Harlow could never bring herself to say "cousin Rufus"). "But in regard to Janet, I think her mother is depressed by this listlessness of hers, this lack of interest in life. She and Janet re-act upon each other, it seems to me, and ought to be separated for a little while."

"Ah?" Mr. Vail was actually listening.

"And so I've been wishing to confer with you on the subject, and ask your opinion of my taking Janet home with me next week for a little visit. It would give Edward and me a great deal of pleasure; and we would promise to take excellent care of her, Mr. Vail."

The gentleman thanked Miss Harlow with effusion. He was extremely glad she had called his attention to Janet's need of a change. Something must be done, surely. He would confer with Hattie to-night, and talk further with Miss Harlow to-morrow evening; for of course she would attend Janet's birthday party?—just a few friends. Oh, yes! he had great respect for cousin Brenda's opinion: he would consider it well.

The diplomatic little lady's eyes danced with delight, for she never doubted she had gained her point. But she reckoned without her host.

"Daughter," said Mrs. Vail, after lunch next day, speaking slowly and carefully, as if repeating a lesson

by rote, "your father seems to be struck with the idea that you are becoming morbid; and he says it's bad for me, as we re-act upon each other, and it would be better for us to separate a little while."

"Separate? Why, mamma!"

"Only a little while, my dear. He suggests a — a visit to Boston."

"Oh the dear good man! How lovely!" exclaimed Janet, seizing little Bertha, and whirling her about.

"Stop a moment. Did you think I meant you? No, you can't leave your school: it is I your father means."

"You, mamma?" Janet tried to be brave, but the sudden disappointment was keen.

"Yes: Dr. Devol has been saying all along that I needed a change, and your father hasn't seemed alive to it, you know; but now he insists that I shall go home with cousin Brenda. Will you think me unkind and selfish, daughter, if I leave you a while?"

She spoke so sweetly that Janet's generous heart was touched.

"Selfish and unkind? As if I could think that of my dear little mother! I'm only too glad cousin Brenda asked you."

"But she didn't. Really, there's the point. It was you she asked," said Mrs. Vail reluctantly; "and that does make me feel so guilty, my dear! But your father says it is all folly, for your going is out of the question."

There was a painful twitching of Janet's mouth as she stooped to kiss little Bertha.

"And you know how he is when he gets an idea in

his head. I don't see how I can help going: do you? But, my child, how pale you look! What is it?"

"Nothing. I was only thinking of papa, and wondering what I should do with him without you," said Janet, with unconscious pathos.

"Oh, fie! One would fancy Papa Vail was an ogre."

The "friends in council" mourned over this news as they discussed it at dinner.

"So your special pleading was thrown away last night, cousin Brenda?"

"Yes, Tim, and worse! Won't Edward laugh when he sees me coming, with Hattie and all her clothes to take care of! And I had such plans for Janet! I am more disappointed than I can tell," went on Miss Harlow in an unsteady voice. "And now we shall go to her party to-night, and see that man's lover-like attentions to his daughter! The thing I hate most in Rufus Vail is his hypocrisy."

"He is not very hypocritical in his treatment of me," said Mr. Braxton. "It would be difficult; for I learned him pretty thoroughly when I was a clerk in his store, and he knows it."

"Yes, and hates you for it," added Brenda, starting for Mr. Vail's with Tim, who had promised Janet he would drop in a moment.

It was a little, informal gathering of friends: but the parlor was decorated with costly flowers; Payson had been sent to search the markets for early fruits; and Miss Pike had made Janet a lovely blue silk with an original style of trimming which cost her two sleepless nights of agonizing study, for, whether Mr. Vail's

pampered daughter cared for it or not, she must have a new dress.

From the shining braids of her hair to the tips of her dainty boots she was a model of chaste elegance, and her father had half a mind to say so when his wife led her up to him for inspection before the guests arrived; but remembering in season that the heroic treatment forbids praise, he only said, kissing his wife, —

“It takes a good deal of furbishing to make Janet look well; but you have succeeded this time, and deserve credit.”

The young girl turned sadly away. Not that she minded the doubtful compliment; but what she did mind, and think about during the whole evening, was the smile and kiss that had been given her mother. She pined on her birthday for a caressing look or word from her father; and, even in thanking him for her new Steinway piano, remembered sorrowfully that he had not kissed her since last Christmas.

“Isn’t it strange,” said Fanny Lucas in a low tone to Mr. Braxton, as the little company viewed Janet’s manifold presents that evening, “isn’t it strange how all the rare and beautiful things fall to her share?”

“Passing strange,” responded Tim dryly.

He knew Mr. Lucas’s affairs were in a bad condition, and suspected that Fanny found it hard to go down in the world; while her friend Janet—so perverse is human nature—found it equally hard to go up.

During the evening seventeen wax candles had been burning in a straight row on the parlor mantel, — “one for every year of my daughter’s life, bless her!” said

Mr. Vail. "Now, Janet," he added, as the guests were leaving, "come forward, and blow out these candles, my dear."

It was a pretty little scene, causing much merriment and applause; and everybody went home in fine spirits, saying, "Such a home! such a father!" .

And Jessie Wilder exclaimed feelingly, —

"Mr. Vail just dotes on Janet, and isn't afraid to show it, either!"

"Janet," said this model gentleman, as the last guest departed, "I hope you were awkward enough about blowing out those candles!"

CHAPTER V.

A BONE OF CONTENTION.

“WELL, I hope we shall all hold out to get her off, but I don’t pretend myself to be overstocked with grace,” said Mrs. Bangs the cook, setting the eggs in water to cool when called from cake-making to assist Lavinia in packing their mistress’s trunk.

Mrs. Vail’s journeys were always attended by much disturbance of the domestic economy: but this time, just as every thing was in confusion, and Susan hunting for the key to the portmanteau, Tim walked in with a very sad face, the deep curves about his mouth quivering, and his eyes moist with unshed tears, to break by degrees the dreadful news that Edward Harlow, Brenda’s brother, had met with a fatal accident; he had fallen from his horse, and been instantly killed.

Miss Harlow was to start at once for Boston, and Tim, not Mrs. Vail, was to go with her. As her favorite cousin and her brother’s most intimate friend, he was the very companion Brenda would have chosen. He mourned with her, yet he could be silent: he would not wring her heart by well-meant condolences.

“We cannot comfort her, Timothy; but she will be comforted of God in his good time,” said aunt Rossy, as Tim bent over her to say good-by before leaving.

“This doesn’t look much like an overruling Providence,” stormed Mr. Vail, on hearing the news at dinner-time. “What will become of Brenda? She has no relatives in Boston, and no near ones anywhere for that matter. Write her, Hattie, and tell her she can have a home with us.”

And a few days later Mrs. Vail, or rather Janet, did write; but, when Miss Harlow answered, she declined the invitation with thanks. She did not say what she felt, that no abomination of desolation could ever drive her to take refuge under Rufus Vail’s roof: she simply stated that she had resolved to go to Quinnebasset in Maine, her native town and Hattie’s, and try to solace herself there by the society of several old friends of her youth. Quinnebasset, besides being beautiful and retired, was an inland town, secure from sharp sea-breezes, and might prove a good place for her health.

Mr. Vail was amazed that “Brenda should bury herself alive:” still there was no denying that he had treated her with extreme generosity, and he would remember it in his own favor as long as he lived. His wife talked of it proudly, and applauded him to her friends. She could ill afford to lose sight of his virtues, for it must be said his failings grew apace.

During the next year his temper became so imperious that even aunt Rossy thought something was wrong, and questioned if Rufus was “always pleasant in his family.” Mr. Braxton was obliged to stand helplessly by, while Janet underwent “the crushing process;” and the only person to whom he could speak on the subject was Mr. Madison Tukey, Rufus Vail’s confidential clerk.

Mr. Tukey was a tall, dark, reserved man, often taken by strangers for a Spaniard; and whenever Janet chanced to meet him she wondered why he should fix his large black eyes upon her with so melancholy a gaze.

Mr. Braxton pitied Janet; but his sister was tolerably happy, he thought, or she would give some sign. Mrs. Vail had more womanly pride, however, than he suspected. She told all her headaches, but her heart-aches were sacred even from her dear brother Tim.

"Janet, where were you last night?" asked Mr. Vail sharply, one morning at breakfast.

"At aunt Rossy's, sir."

"Did your uncle play the fiddle?"

"Yes, sir."

Music was Mr. Braxton's only vice; but Mr. Vail agreed with Dr. Johnson, that "to some men God gives reason and judgment, to others the art of playing the violin."

"And you sang to the scraping?"

"Rufus," broke in Mrs. Vail sweetly, "will you have the cream?"

"I am talking to my daughter," said he, swinging about in his chair. "I've endured this about long enough. Giving you a musical education" —

"Now, Rufus," ventured Mrs. Vail again.

"Harriet!" cried the irate man, rapping on the table with his fork as if correcting one of the children. "This running over to aunt Rossy's, and dancing to that fiddle, must be stopped at once. I forbid you, Janet, to go to aunt Rossy's again this spring without leave. Do you hear? Then speak!"

“Yes, sir,” said Janet.

Oh! how wearisome it was, for the morning lecture had only begun! And to-morrow her mother would leave her to bear it alone, — this or something worse. Mrs. Vail had visited more than usual during the past year. It was only a month since her return from Buffalo; and now she was going to New Jersey to see the Severances, and Janet dreaded it, for the Severance visits were usually longest of all. Tim dreaded it too. He knew these absences were torture to Janet, and he ventured that morning to say something of the sort to his sister.

Mrs. Vail looked uncomfortable.

“Brother dear, I know just what you think. Rufus is too hard on Janet, and I’m almost sorry I’m going to leave her.”

“Then don’t go,” was the quick reply: “there’s no need of it, is there?”

“Why, brother, how can you speak so — so unfeelingly, when you know perfectly well *why* I go? You know there’s no other way, just at this time.”

Why did she emphasize the last four words, and look at him so beseechingly? Did they both suspect that a crisis of some sort was impending “just at this time”? If so, was it a mother’s part to flee, and leave her daughter to face it alone? Evidently Tim was not satisfied.

“He blames me,” thought Mrs. Vail tearfully. “He doesn’t understand that I can’t stay: my nerves wouldn’t allow it.”

When Janet came home to lunch she found her mother on the sofa, quite over-wrought.

“It’s not altogether the packing : it’s my mind, dear. It’s thinking of the state of things between you and your father. I do wish you wouldn’t be so cold and indifferent, as if you didn’t care whether you pleased him or not.”

“Why, I can’t please him, mamma, you know I can’t; and lately I’ve given up trying,” said Janet, with an effort to speak calmly.

“O my daughter, how dreadful ! And why will you, when he is talking, sit stiff as a stone image, as if you didn’t hear a word ? ”

“I’m trying to be a philosopher, that’s all,” replied Janet with a trembling voice.

“Well, dear, it only irritates him ; and I felt as if I couldn’t go away without saying something about it. Just go up to him when he comes home to-night, and stroke his hair as you do mine, and see if you don’t win a smile.”

“I should win a frown, mamma, because I shouldn’t do it gracefully : I’m not a little fairy like you.”

“O Janet ! jealous of me, — jealous of your poor little mother ? ”

“No, no, not that. I don’t ask to share equally with you, but I do think sometimes I’d like a little love,” returned Janet piteously. “Is it wrong to want a few crumbs ? ”

“Dear, dear ! Why, Papa Vail finds fault with me in the same way. He really seems to take it ill of me that I love you so well,” cried Mrs. Vail, growing hysterical.

“What, my own father ? ”

“Yes : he comes to me about you, and you come to

me about him. You're a bone of contention between us, and it is really too dreadful."

"Isn't my own father willing you should love me?" repeated Janet so tragically that Mrs. Vail was startled.

"Oh, I didn't mean to say it, dear! I always mean to be careful; but you know how excitable he is, and how trying you've been."

"Stop, please stop! My father doesn't love me himself. I've thought so a great many times, but now I know it," cried Janet, a great wave of desolation sweeping over her.

"Why, darling, how wildly you talk! I ought to see Dr. Devol about your nerves," exclaimed Mrs. Vail, hurriedly offering the vinaigrette. Ammonia for the heartache!

"O mother, I didn't know fathers ever hated their children!"

It was a cry of anguish, but Mrs. Vail only half understood it.

"You need a little nux, dear," said she with tender solicitude: "your cheeks are flushed, and your eyes shine fearfully."

"Oh, it isn't that! it isn't that!" said Janet, burying her face in the cushions with a vague feeling that she missed something in her mother, some subtle bond of sympathy which she had been vainly seeking all her life.

But Mrs. Vail was alive to the one fact that her daughter seemed feverish.

"Let me see your tongue, dear."

It was too absurd: Janet laughed wildly.

“I think, on the whole, you should take aconite, and go straight to bed. O my daughter, how I dread to leave you!” said Mrs. Vail, rising on her elbow.

“There, little mother: don’t fret about me, you precious woman. I’m perfectly well,” returned Janet, much moved. “Go away, and have a good time; and when you come home I’ll behave better.”

“When I come home! Oh, what may happen before that time!” exclaimed Mrs. Vail, pressing her child to her heart with a sudden burst of feeling. “Oh, I dread even to think of what may happen!”

Janet soothed her, considering this a “little freak of the nerves,” and attaching no importance whatever to the vehement words. If she had really known what they meant, her parting with her mother next morning would have been very different.

CHAPTER VI.

ANTICIPATION.

“SO you’re the mistress now, Jinny,” said Mrs. Bangs the cook, who, as if to place Janet at her ease, always addressed her by her first name.

She was washing dishes at the marble sink in the china-closet, and Janet stood near her at the dining-room door.

“Yes, Mrs. Bangs,” — very respectfully; “and to-day we will have turkey with oysters, if you please, and apple-pie, and Italian creams.”

“So we will, if I can scare up any cream,” was the obliging reply.

As a preacher’s widow, and an old friend of the Vail family, Mrs. Bangs held herself far above the grade of an ordinary servant, and was allowed certain liberties of speech which were simply astonishing to the other maids, Lavinia and Susan.

“There’s one thing I’d like to ask you, Jinny. Your birthday is coming next week, and what’s going to be done about it?”

“Nothing: we shall have to let it come.”

“But there’s always been such a fuss made over it! I lived with your mother on Nostrand Avenue from the time you were a year old till you were almost six,

and there wasn't a birthday but there was some kind of a party; and it's been the same since I came back two years ago — only more so."

"You may set your heart at rest, Mrs. Bangs. With mother gone, there'll be nothing done this year, and no trouble for you; though I always did anticipate something remarkable for my eighteenth birthday," added Janet, idly following Mrs. Bangs into the kitchen.

"Well, it may be remarkable yet, — *you* don't know," said the preacher's widow, beating eggs furiously, and sighing to herself, "Poor thing! poor thing!"

"Where is Susan?" asked Janet.

"Gone to meeting. She always goes Saturdays. She's a seven-d'y woman, you know."

"No, I didn't. What is a seven-d'y woman?"

"One that keeps Saturday instead of Sunday. I do wonder, Jinny, at your mother's employing a seven-d'y woman, — off two days in a week so, to meeting a-Saturday, and visiting a-Sunday."

"Papa likes Susan: he says she is very pretty, and waits on the table nicely."

"Oh! I thought that was it. He always looks daggers at me when I take her place, because I'm *heejus*, I suppose," said Mrs. Bangs, who rather prided herself on her ugliness.

She had ill-matched features, a brawny figure, and wore in general a deep mourning calico, with a sort of miniature gravestone at the throat in the shape of a black brooch.

"Well, I only hope I shall have the grace to hold out

Saturdays, and I hope Loviny will too. I've just sent her off with the children, so I can have full swing."

Then, as Janet lingered at the window, she added in a softened tone, —

"What do you see out there that's so interesting?"

"Nothing but the stable and the vegetable-garden. Both the children are in the stable: did you know it?"

"Yes: I let Loviny take 'em out. It's nice enough out there for the king's children. I don't want to envy your father's horses, — the Lord forbid! — but if husband and I could have had as handsome a house as they have to live in, we should have thought we were made for this world, — cream-colored brick, and gilded shades to the windows! I sincerely hope your pa's money ain't going to prove a snare to him: but folks do say he's aiming to be worth a million; and you know as well as I do what the Bible says about 'they that have riches,' " said Mrs. Bangs with solemn emphasis, as Janet was leaving the kitchen.

"Well, Janey," said Tim, meeting her in the hall, valise in hand, "I'm unexpectedly called away."

"You too, Tim!" exclaimed Janet in a grieved tone. "And my birthday coming so soon! Don't stay long, will you?"

"My dear girl, you'll have to support my absence three days," returned Tim jocosely, though his big heart yearned over the poor child. "If there was something I could do for you, you'd tell me; wouldn't you, Janey?"

"Oh, yes, Tim! you before anybody."

"Bless your little soul! I hate to leave you," said he, taking her hand. "But I'll give you this bit of

parting advice, Janey: Drink the cup of life as it comes; don't stir it up from the bottom."

He smiled as he spoke; though it so happened that his own cup of life that morning was no sweeter to the taste than hers, the only difference being that he was learning to drink without a wry face. Rufus Vail had contrived to instil a drop of gall into the potion by using his influence against Tim, and depriving him of a long-expected and lucrative engagement.

Janet's birthday fell this year on Wednesday. It was the 12th of April, and "one of those days when the wind is in the east, and it is customary for people to hang themselves." As the gloomy morning sun struggled into the breakfast-room, it seemed to remind Mr. Vail of all the disagreeable events of his life; and he lectured in so loud a tone as to be overheard by the servants in the kitchen "laying down the law."

"Don't he beat all for the gift of continuance?" said Mrs. Bangs, who stood at the range frying fritters for Susan Dimmock to take in. "Let us be thankful, Susan, that we ain't great heiresses like Jinny, and can eat *our* meals in peace."

Here the preacher's widow made a sort of pulpit gesture with the fritter-shovel.

When Mr. Vail's lecture was ended, — or, more properly, suspended, — he left the house without having once mentioned his daughter's birthday.

"He can't have forgotten it: he never forgets any thing," thought Janet. And though the day had not opened well, she was not disheartened, for it might close brilliantly.

When school was over she hastened home to lunch

with a flutter of pleasant anticipation. Something beautiful had happened, or was just going to happen, she knew. As she turned in at the yard, a sharp wind blew in her face. One of the raw, disagreeable days of last winter had strayed back again; and the trees shook gloomily, as if trembling for the fate of the little buds beginning to swell at the tips of their branches.

"Ugh, how cold!" said Mrs. Bangs, opening the front-door with a shiver. "I just said to Payson, 'If your peach-trees blow now, 'twill be their death-blow,' said I."

"Has an express come for me, Mrs. Bangs?"

"An express? No. I s'pose you expect something special to-day; but I wouldn't look too hard, Jinny: I've lived in this world three and thirty years, and I never yet saw any good in grabbing time by the forelock," said Mrs. Bangs in a discouraging tone; but Janet only laughed carelessly, and, hanging up her hat and cloak in the hall-closet, passed on to the dining-room.

Here she found an unusually inviting lunch awaiting her; and beside her plate lay a small nosegay of spring violets, a token that, at any rate, somebody had remembered her birthday.

"I fought I'd come and bring 'em: Susy told me to," remarked little Bertha from her high chair, taking the credit of the flowers to herself, and receiving a rapturous kiss for her pains.

"I broke the vase, Jinnet, I did; but papa won't scold. He never scolds to me: he scolds to *you*," added the little one, giving in these few words the result of a long course of observation.

“Better eat your lunch, Bertha, and not talk,” said Mrs. Bangs, handing Janet her chocolate. “I see, Jinny, you look as if you had got keyed up for something uncommon; and I’m kind o’ sorry, for I’m afraid you’ll meet with disappointment.”

There was a certain wistful look in the widow’s sharp face as she spoke, that caused Janet to ask quickly, “Why, Mrs. Bangs, what do you mean? Has any thing happened?”

“Happened? Oh, no! what am I talking about? Sister Page used to say, ‘Don’t bid good-morrow to Trouble till you meet him;’ and that’s a good text for all of us, I’m thinking. Not that sister Page lived up to it though” —

“Good-morrow to Trouble? I don’t know what you mean. I’m not looking for trouble to-day, of all days,” laughed Janet.

“I know you ain’t, child; but we never can tell what’s in store for us. As the old hymn-book says, —

‘We should suspect some danger nigh
When most we feel delight.’”

“Oh! that just makes me creep! It doesn’t sound a bit like you, either, Mrs. Bangs, to quote such a horrid hymn as that!”

“That’s a fact. I don’t know what’s got into me, Jinny,” said the widow, suddenly disappearing into the kitchen, her face working with strong emotion. “No, it ain’t the hysterics,” said she to the wondering Susan. “I never cry without I have a good reason for it. But it ain’t always best to tell all you know: ’twill come out soon enough,” said she, wiping her eyes on her bib-apron.

While Janet and little Bertha lingered over their lunch, a storm began to beat against the windows, adding not a little to their enjoyment; for, to be thoroughly happy in-doors, one needs the contrast of bad weather outside. Janet looked about her with a glance of quiet satisfaction. How could she have been so unhappy only this morning at breakfast? How could she have thought and said last week to her mother that her father did not love her? It was simply absurd. There was not a better father in the world, — that is, if he were not worried to death by business; and surely there never was a sweeter mother or a more charming home.

“Everybody envies me, and I don’t wonder,” thought she, passing the cheese-cakes to Bertha.

“O Jinnet! it’s your birfday; and you’d better play dolls with me so you can have a good time,” suggested the little one with noble disinterestedness.

“So I will. Come into the story-room, and bring a whole armful,” said Janet, resigning herself to the situation.

She was soon appointed physician extraordinary to a thoroughly diseased family, all down at once with fevers, scarlet, yellow, and various other colors; but while carrying the patients triumphantly through these appalling disorders, to the motherly satisfaction of Bertha, she never for a moment forgot to watch the windows for the expressman.

There were little packages arriving now and then, — a beautiful necklace from her mother, a white lace scarf from Fanny Lucas, a copy of Browning’s poems from Tim; but these were all brought by messengers,

and no expressman appeared. As for letters, Janet did not once think of them till she saw the postman coming up the path.

“Run to the door, Bertha, and get the mail, please,” said she in an indifferent tone.

The child skipped away at her bidding, and returned with two letters.

Janet glanced at them carelessly. One was a dainty little missive from her mother; the other a clumsy affair, in a yellow envelope, addressed to Mrs. Theresa Bangs in the cramped handwriting of her young step-daughter.

“Here, darling, take this to Mrs. Bangs. And you needn’t come back, for your children are all well now: I want to read my letter.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE LETTER.

JANET turned the letter over in her hand, wondering a little that her mother should have written again so soon : for writing was irksome to Mrs. Vail ; and her letters were apt to be rare, and, to say the truth, a trifle dry. Janet opened the envelope with a paper-knife quite leisurely.

“My dear idolized daughter,” were the first words that met her eye ; and she smiled, half amused at “little mother’s sentimentality ;” but, as she read on, the smile gave place to a look of utter bewilderment. “For daughter is the sweet name I give you in my prayers, and as my own child I shall always love and cherish you.” (“Why, certainly you will, little mother : I knew that before !”) “But the time has come, dear, when I can no longer conceal from you the fact that you are not mine by birth, but by adoption. God sent you to me when you were an infant, not a year old. Your father will tell you the rest. I have fulfilled my promise of writing the main facts, and now I can say no more : my heart is too full. Dearest, sweetest daughter, good-by.”

Janet read the letter through with scarcely the movement of a muscle. She continued to hold it in her

hand, and gaze at it fixedly; but the words had no meaning. She moved her arm unconsciously, and touched the box of Browning's poems on the table. It fell to the floor with a loud noise, but she did not hear it. Her whole being was absorbed in gazing at that letter which, nevertheless, she did not see.

Mrs. Bangs came in timidly. It was a new thing for Mrs. Bangs to be timid.

"Didn't something fall, Jinny? I heard" —

No answer: Janet was gazing at the letter. It had fallen on the floor, but she still gazed.

"Why, Jinny!"

Janet did not turn her eyes. She seemed spell-bound: Mrs. Bangs thought she was rigid. She went up to her in alarm, and shook her. Janet cried out faintly.

"You poor cosset lamb!" said the good woman hoarsely, for unfortunately she could never be tender without being hoarse.

She drew Janet down to the sofa, cooed over her, and stroked her hair the wrong way; but there was no response.

"Stunned!" said Mrs. Bangs to herself.

On the contrary, Janet was alive with throbbing agony. She did not move or speak, simply because her power of will had failed her for the moment. She thought it would never be worth while to speak again; and, as for tears, the fountain was sealed, and a stone lay over it. The world had come to an end. Henceforth, for ever and ever, it would be the same as if she were dead. And oh, if she could only lie cool and unconscious, like a gray rock under its crown of moss!

“Do speak to me, for mercy’s sake,” shrieked Mrs. Bangs. “What is it?”

A shudder ran through Janet’s nerves, but she quite forgot to reply. Mrs. Bangs was really alarmed for her wits.

“Here,” said she, picking up the letter. “You dropped this. Was there any thing in it that set you off in this way? Speak up and tell me, Jinny.”

As Mrs. Bangs afterwards said, “That seemed to fetch her to.” She sprang up, exclaiming wildly, —

“Don’t hold me! I’m going away, I’m going home!”

“Why, this is your home, you poor little cosset!”

“Don’t hold me,” repeated Janet, escaping from Mrs. Bangs’s bony embrace, and pacing the floor.

“No father, no mother!” then, gazing at the paintings on the wall, “Undine had no father, no mother: naturally enough that’s why she had no soul!”

“Now, look here, Jinny: I’m going to send for the doctor if you don’t talk more rational.”

“Oh, I’m rational, I’m too rational: let me look at the pictures, and then I’ll explain,” moaned Janet, longing to bury herself a moment in fancies before she grappled with facts, — just as we bury our hands in bandages before touching hot iron.

But Mrs. Bangs thought her reason was going, and twitched her vigorously by the shoulders, exclaiming, —

“Turn right square round, child, and look at me: *I* know what is in that letter there on the floor.”

“You?”

“Yes, me.”

“When did you read it?”

“Lor’, child! Did you think I’d be seen reading your letters? I know what your mother wrote, though, every namable thing.”

“O Mrs. Bangs, Mrs. Bangs!”

“Yes, Jinny: I understand the whole story just like a book, and I came in here kind o’ hoping I could help you to bear it; but now I don’ know what *to* do, — whether to go or stay.”

“Oh, stay!” cried Janet, seizing the widow’s arm.

“Mother was joking, — joking, you know.”

“No, it’s all true; and I was living with her when she took you.”

“Took me? Took me?” The poor girl pressed both hands to her forehead. “I didn’t read about that.”

“Well, I’m real sorry for you, Jinny. I knew ’twould come hard. She ought to have started fair with you; but she didn’t, and that’s where she made a mistake, — she and your father: I suppose they *meant* right,” said Mrs. Bangs, with an upward lift of the nose.

“Meant right?” echoed Janet.

“Why, yes: they took you for their own to hold and to keep, and they didn’t want you to know any difference. They were bound and determined you *shouldn’t* know any difference, not till you were eighteen years old.”

“Why, this was my birthday,” broke in Janet, unconsciously using the past tense.

Every thing had gone out of her life now, birthdays and all.

“Yes, I’ve labored with your ma, trying to convince

her she was doing wrong, waiting so. She ought to have told you when you were little, and wouldn't have cared so much. But she had it her own way ; and it's my honest opinion, she went off on this visit now just a-purpose so she wouldn't have to see you suffer. She's dreadful tender-hearted in her way, — your mother is. There, there, cry a little : there's a good girl ! You don't know how you worry me, Jinny : your eyes look as if they were afire."

"What time is it?" cried Janet, springing up in absolute terror, as the setting sun broke through the clouds. "Father will be coming home, and I can't see him. Where shall I hide?"

"Hide? You've no call to hide, child ; but if I was in your place, I'd go up to my room and try to get sort o' composed, and I'll follow along in a few minutes. I've got more to say ; but this is no place to talk, with your pa liable to drop in any minute."

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. BANGS'S STORY.

JANET had been in her own room but a few minutes when Mrs. Bangs appeared, with Jamie asleep in her arms.

“He dropped off over his bread and milk, and I guess he’s in for it for the night,” said she, depositing him on Janet’s bed with a thud which would have wakened any baby of less decision of character; “and I’ve left Susan and Loviny both in charge of the dinner: so there’s nothing to hinder my telling you that story.”

Here she seated herself on the bed, clasped her knees with both hands, and looked attentively at the wall, while Janet fixed her eyes upon her in rapt silence.

“Well, you see, as I said, Jinny, I was living with your mother at the time. It was on the avenue, in that brown cottage. The way I happened to be there in the first place: she was a Quinnebasset girl, Hiram Braxton’s daughter, cousin to the first Mrs. Asbury, that I thought so much of; and I liked your mother too. She was a handsome young lady, — very pretty-spoken: and I was a small girl, and used to go by the house, and watch her at work in the garden; and she never spied me peeking through the fence but she called to me and gave me a posy.

“ Well, she married and moved off to Brooklyn ; and five years afterwards Judge Davenport of that town, he came to our house, — we lived a little ways out of the village, — and told what a hard time Hattie Braxton had with poor help, and how she wanted a good Yankee girl, that she could depend upon, and he thought I would suit. He was going to Brooklyn the next week with his wife, and I could travel with them. I was only sixteen, and mother was rather *skitty* about it ; but aunt Sally said I was ‘ a spry, capable piece,’ and she’d risk me. So the upshot of it was, I went, and staid at your house till I was twenty-one ; only coming home on visits twice.

“ It wasn’t all strawb’ries and cream, for I never took any great of a fancy to your father. He hadn’t got up to the height he is now, and he used to be round in the kitchen a good deal in those days ; and, ‘ deliver me from a Betty !’ say I. I was all the help your mother had. She was in good health then, and hadn’t taken to these headaches and fine-lady ways ; though I must say she was great for puttering about in a half-bushel, — sort of tewing round and bothering.

“ Well, I’d been with her about a year, — I know I was seventeen that fall, and this was in December. It was a pretty cold night : the wind blew, and it was falling dark. I’d gone out to take in the clothes, — I remember now they switched on the line, — and I’d just got ’em cleverly into the basket, and was sort of taking breath, for it seemed as if the wind cut right through me, — when I saw a woman come along to the area steps with a couple of children in her arms. My first thought was that it was a ‘ straggler ;’ and I

was glad your father happened to be gone, for he hadn't much patience with that class o' folks, and would have spoken out pretty rough to the woman; and I pitied her. She looked about froze.

" 'Come in and warm yourself, do,' says I, just as free as if the house belonged to me. Why, I'd no more think of taking such a liberty now! You can see by that how times have changed. The woman was trembling all over; and I helped her down the steps and into the kitchen, thinking I'd make her some ginger-tea before I said a word to your mother. She had on good clothes, but too thin for the time o' year, and was out of breath walking in the wind. I s'pose she'd come a good ways.

" 'When the tea was ready I brought it to her, and took the biggest child to hold. She thanked me with a tear in her eye, and that sort of melted me towards her. Besides, I liked the looks of her face: it had that patient, suffering look, like your aunt Rossy's, as if she didn't expect any thing in this world but sorrow and trouble.

" 'I asked her to open her shawl, and let me look at the baby. 'Twas an old-fashioned little thing, a girl about eight months old, all cuddled up to her as warm as toast.

" ' 'You won't travel another rod to-night,' says I. 'I'll make it all right with the lady of the house.'

" 'So I went up-stairs to your mother, carrying the boy in my arms; for he was sound asleep, and I wanted to lay him down somewhere. Your mother was in the parlor, reading. You remember that room with the buff paper and the haircloth sofy? She looked up

from her book, and scolded me some for letting in tramps when Mr. Vail was gone. I told her there was no tramp about it; and, if she didn't believe me, she'd better go down and see for herself. She went, and I with her. But what a *gashful* sight met our gaze! There was that poor woman stretched out on the kitchen floor, her face covered with blood, where she'd fainted, and hit her forehead against the sharp edge of the table.

"First we thought she was dead; but no, she hadn't got to the end of her troubles yet, poor thing. When we fetched her to, she says to your mother, —

" 'You don't know me, Harriet Braxton?'

"And your mother couldn't for the life of her recollect that she'd ever set eyes on her before. 'We used to play together,' says the woman with a sad kind of a smile. 'My name was Abby Harrington.'

"Then it all came to your mother; and she kissed her and cried, — there never was anybody so easy to cry as your mother: but the name of Harrington was like a dream to me; for the family had died out of Quinnebasset when I was a small child, and I never was much acquainted in the village anyway.

" 'Where did you come from? and how did you get here?' said your mother. Then the woman explained that she married a Scotchman, — your mother knew that, — a school-teacher named Donald Keith, and went to California with him; and he died there, and her parents were dead, and she was like to die too; and what would become of her children? She'd got as far as New York some time ago, expecting to find her brother; but *he* was dead: I never heard of such a family for dying off!

"Then she had looked up Hattie's address in the directory, — she knew she married a Vail; and here she'd come as a last resort, for she knew she couldn't live long.

"It was real pitiful; and all the while she was talking, your mother would cry. I heard the whole, but said nothing till she turned to me, — I mean your mother, — and said, 'Theresa,' said she, 'what should you think of my taking these children and rearing 'em as my own?' You know, she was always asking advice, and never heeding it: she was what I call 'freaky;' and her notions, as a general thing, didn't hold out very steady.

"'What do you know of the care of children, Harriet Braxton?' said I. 'You're too excitable, and your husband gone from home as much as a sea-cap'n.' He was what you call a 'runner' for a dry-goods store.

"'Well,' says she, playing with her fingers as if she hadn't heard a word, 'I'll see Mr. Vail about it. And now, Theresa, you make a fire in the guest-chamber, and air the sheets; and poor Abby Keith shall have one good night's rest, if it's in our power.'

"We did our best; but the poor woman's days were numbered, and when she entered that chamber I felt it in my bones that she'd never leave it alive. Some days she would rally a little, and then relapse back; and finally she failed suddenly, and died before Mr. Vail got home from his trip out West. There hadn't been any promise made about the children; but she seemed to give 'em up to the Lord, and die easy. She felt that *something* would be done; for your mother

was so kind and loving, and she and I had both taken such a fancy to the little girl. The boy was just at the crying age; you couldn't wash his face but he screamed: but the girl was as sweet as a rose.

“Well, when Mr. Vail came home, the first thing his wife did was to take him up-stairs, and show him those two children asleep in her room, — the girl in the bed, the boy in a crib at the side. He laughed, and said he, ‘Why, what have you got here?’ Your mother told the story; and while she was talking the little girl woke up, and held out her hands to your father, and that pleased him. I remember just how he looked, for I had come up to bring the bottle of milk. He took up the baby, and kissed it, and let it pull his hair, and called it a beauty. ‘I want to know, Hattie, if you’re going to turn the house into a nursery?’ says he. ‘Oh, no!’ says she, patting his cheek lovingly: ‘I sha’n’t do any thing you don’t approve of, Rufy my dear; but I find my heart’s clinging to the little girl. What *do* you think of keeping her?’

“She knew when she said that he’d tell her to do it, for he wanted to see her pleased. She always had her way with your pa in those days, unless he was otherwise-minded at the start. You know how she kind of smooths things over, and pretends to ask advice? It’s a real pretty way she has, and rather reconciles folks to her being so nervous.

“Well, I will say one thing: I never saw a man fonder of children than your father was, and he took to the baby right off. But he didn’t like the boy, — in fact, he was dead set against him, — and I guess there wasn’t much pleading done for the little fellow: anyway, he went to the asylum.

“Yes, he was your own brother, Jinny, and his name was Harry. I wish I could tell you what has become of him. Your mother said he shouldn't stay at the asylum but a little while. She talked up as brisk, and said she'd write to her father, or to Judge Davenport of Quinnebasset, to be a father to him; because she had got her hands full with the little girl, and she never should forget how Abby Harrington trusted her with both those orphans.

“She never wrote to her father, for he died; and I don't know whether she wrote to the judge, or not. You know your mother is apt to be forgetful, especially when her interest in a thing kind o' dies out. But I'm sure *somebody* took that boy out of the asylum: seems to me 'twas a Maine man too. I was asking your mother about it this spring; and she said she was ashamed to confess she'd lost the clew to him, but she rather mistrusted the man that took him had moved to Maine,—in fact, she was sure he had, and Poonoosac was the town, or anyway some town near Quinnebasset: she meant to look him up for your sake.

“Yes, that's all I know about him. He must be twenty years old by this time; and perhaps he'll turn out a preacher, perhaps a blackleg,—there's no telling which. Yes, you have some feeling about it; and I don't wonder. You're full of feeling, Jinny; and I've sometimes thought 'twas kind of a misfortune: folks don't get along so well in this world that have too much.

“When did your father begin to get tired of you? Why, Jinny, what a question! Who ever said he was

tired? He's naturally fond of *small* children, especially girls; and I don't think he *does* take to 'em quite as much after they get bigger. Well, to tell the truth, your father *has* changed some: his disposition *is* rather pudgicky. He has grown more worldly-minded, and he's always been a stranger to the grace of God; and then, too, I don't know but what, after Bertha was born, he *did* see a difference, — 'twouldn't be strange.

“But, Jinny, you mustn't mind; for your mother has always stood by you. She leans on you now a good deal more than she does on your father. Your uncle Tim has spoken of it to me. He thinks it was most a miracle you wasn't spoiled, having naturally such a temper; and your mother laughing at your tantrums, and shielding you from your father. I never approved of that, and I never approved of keeping you in ignorance as to your birth. Your mother was afraid you wouldn't love her so well if you knew it, and she gave out word that she shouldn't forgive anybody that would tell you the story. I says to her, ‘Lor’, Mrs. Vail! everybody in Brooklyn knows it that's acquainted with the family, and how are you going to help yourself?’

“‘I don't care who knows it,’ says she, ‘if they won't tell Janet. I shall tell her myself when she's eighteen years old, and not a day sooner.’

“Well, you went to school with other little girls, and it was generally supposed some of them would tell you. Queer they didn't, now, wasn't it? especially considering they must have got mad with you time and again, for you used to have spells of being real resolute and aggravating. Not but what you were a

good, conscientious little thing, though, as pleasant as children commonly are that have red hair. I always did hope you'd hear the story when you were younger, and could bear it better; but 'twasn't so to be.

“Don't look so, Jinny. Why, there's something so unnatural about your eyes and the set of your face! Try to cast your burden on the Lord, child: he'll help you bear it.

“Things ain't changed any from what they were yesterday. All the change is in you: don't you know? This is your home, just the same as ever; and if your father and mother ain't your own, why, they were sent to you to take the place of your own; and when you've thought it over a while, and got used to it, you'll gradually settle down to it and not mind.

“If I could only see you cry, just one whimper! Look here, Jinny, you go to bed now, and try to sleep; and to-morrow morning you go over and see aunt Rossy. She can talk to you better than I can. I want to see you come out of this, and feel different. There, good-night now, you poor cosset lamb!”

CHAPTER IX.

RUMINATING.

FANCY a little bird flying gayly through the air, bearing a few feathery troubles at heart, it may be, but singing a bright morning song; when suddenly the blue sky around him is transformed into a wild waste of waters, and the poor frightened bird finds himself engulfed, overwhelmed. "This isn't the world I thought it was; I can't breathe in it; I'm stifling!" cried Janet, wringing her hands.

A sharp peal at the door-bell: her father had come. In her mother's absence Janet was depended upon to let him in. "You know, daughter, I always meet him at the door myself when I am at home and can sit up; and when I am away he expects the same of you," Mrs. Vail had often said.

"But 'daughter' won't do it to-night, not to-night! He'd rather meet Mrs. Bangs. Was it to-day I blamed myself for doubting his love?" thought Janet, sinking into an easy-chair. "It seems a month ago. I thought I was jealous; but it was not jealousy, it was insight. Insight is seeing with the eyes of your soul; and *that* was the way I saw that father didn't love me, when mother appeared so strangely last week, the day before she left. I needn't have tried to reason myself

out of what I saw then, for reason is dull and good for nothing.

“But I never dreamed of this! O mother! how could you have gone away when you knew this was coming? If you’d loved me you couldn’t have gone: you would have wanted to be here to stand between father and me! Ah, little Jamie! suppose it had been you?” said Janet, softly kissing the dimpled darling on the bed, and finding something so inexpressibly touching in the little rings of soft hair curling about his forehead, the pink flush warming his baby cheek, that she broke down for the first time, and wept freely.

“Suppose it had been you, Jamie? Why, she *couldn’t* have gone! But nothing like this will ever happen to you, my rosy darling! Papa Vail may be hard by and by: but he won’t crush you to the earth, and set his foot on your neck; for you are his own, his very own little boy! And, whatever comes, you have a mother who will stand by you and love you. Oh, you and little Bertha are happy creatures! God meant you should be happy, but I suppose he thought it wasn’t worth while about me.”

Mr. Vail’s voice was heard now from the dining-room, rather high-pitched and querulous. “Inquiring for me, I suppose. What will Mrs. Bangs do? I can’t see him now after I’ve been crying. Hush! What do I cry for? Was it my fault that I was a foundling left at his door? What made him take me in? He might have known I’d become a ‘bone of contention.’ He and mother had no right to let me grow up thinking I belonged to them: I say they had no right!”

What a relief it was to whisper this to the four walls ! Indignation is a strong tonic ; and Janet's sinking heart revived as she walked the floor clinching her hands, while the tears still gushed forth unchecked.

“ Father is waiting, and expects me to go down looking the picture of woe. There's a strong dramatic element in father. He'd like me to fall on my knees at the dining-room door, and beg pardon — for what ? For not knowing any better than to believe I had a right to this house. He'll forgive me if I'll be abject enough. He'll show me an account-book seventeen years old, with a list of all the money I've cost him ; and he'll forgive me the debt ! Oh, yes, if I fall on my knees ! Well, I'm not going to do any such thing. I sha'n't rush down-stairs to have a scene. Not a step will I stir till I'm sent for. I've found out one thing, — I don't love him ; and so I'm glad, yes, I *am* glad, I don't belong to him.”

Janet sat brooding these bitter thoughts in the gathering darkness, every moment fearing to be summoned down-stairs ; but the dinner-hour passed, and no message came. . She was indebted to Mrs. Bangs for this reprieve. The good woman had assured Mr. Vail that “ Jinny was in a singular state, and mustn't be disturbed to-night, or she wouldn't answer for the consequences.” Janet heard her father go into the music-room : it was there he always smoked his cigar, for he was a man of routine. Next he would look over the market-reports in the daily paper, — he never failed of that, — then perhaps a five-minutes stroll in the street, then another cigar, and it would be bedtime. Janet's brain had by no means steadied itself from its

late shock, but she was already planning a decisive line of action.

“If mother had the true mother-love for me, I could bear any thing,” said she, her lips quivering; “but didn’t she say I was a bone of contention between her and father? and mightn’t father behave better if I were gone?”

“‘Drink the cup of life as it comes; don’t stir it up from the bottom.’ That was what Tim said the very day before he left. What did he mean? He knew what was coming. Did he want to warn me not to run away? Why, Tim is not my uncle!” exclaimed she, stung by a new pain. “I didn’t think of that before. What shall I do without Tim? And he always knew and never told! Fanny Lucas, and Jessie Wilder, and all the girls knew: my uncles and aunts knew. Why, I never *had* any uncles and aunts! *The odd one of the family.*”

Janet groaned aloud. How long she sat there musing, she could not have told; but, hearing a rumble of wheels, she went to the window, and raised the curtain. Payson was coming round the curve in the path with the horses. That was strange. Her window was open a little at the top; and she smelt the odor of a cigar, and heard her father’s voice saying something about “night-train for Philadelphia.” Then the wheels rolled away, and there was silence again. It was half a minute before she understood that her father was really gone, — gone perhaps for two days. And he had not seen her yet; so far as she knew, had not inquired for her: this did not seem much like his “longing for a scene,” as she had imagined.

“I *should* think he would want to know how I feel about that letter! Doesn’t he have the *least* interest in me? Why, I might be coming down with brain-fever, for aught he knows. Perhaps I am,” said Janet, pressing her hand to her forehead.

Well, he had gone: there was no doubt about that; and certainly nothing could have been more fortunate if — But did she really mean to run away? She had said so all along; but we often make wild resolves in our desperation, without the least idea of carrying them out.

Janet still stood by the window. The clouds had vanished, and the cool white shine of the far-away stars seemed to chill the sky. She scarcely thought or felt. She could see one corner of the stable; and that reminded her of Mrs. Bangs’s “envying her father’s horses;” and she idly wondered if she, too, should come to envy them some day. She walked to the front window. How dear and familiar that broad street looked, — those bare trees! But how forlorn they were to-night! Did they tire of the same old round of swelling and shrinking, blooming and fading? Yes, that was it. It was a hard world for trees: they had to stand in one spot; they could not run away. She covered her eyes. The trees were too dear, and so were those scrawny rose-bushes at the front door, and even the prosy gravel-path and the iron fence.

“My own dear home! My precious mother, my sweet little sister, my baby brother! It’s of no use. I must go!”

She dropped all the curtains with a decisive sweep, and lighted the gas.

“But where? It’s worse for me than it was for Adam and Eve when they left the garden; for they had each other, and I’m all alone. How I wish I could see Tim, and get some advice! Though if it were contrary to my own views I wouldn’t follow it. And, besides, he won’t be home for two days, which is too long to wait.

“Aunt Rossy couldn’t tell me any thing: she knows all about heaven, but she is a sort of stranger in *this* world. I can’t consult Mrs. Bangs, for if I did she’d consider it her religious duty to lock me up. I must depend on myself,” said Janet, opening the door of her large closet with determination, and surveying a Saratoga trunk which stood in the corner, full to the brim with three crisp new dresses, placed there by Miss Pike to secure them from dust and wrinkles.

“Where I’m going I don’t know, but I may as well begin to pack,” thought she, remembering Goethe’s maxim, “Doubt, of whatever kind, is ended by action alone.”

Exchanging her dress for a loose wrapper, she proceeded to pile up her possessions upon the bed; moving with great care, for what if little Jamie should wake and cry, and, by so doing, change the whole course of her life? Dresses, what quantities of them! First the every-day ones; the dear brown serge, the easy gray merino. Where should she be when she wore them next? The pearl-colored silk: would it ever see another oratorio? The granite-cloth: oh, no! that would never go to Vassar! no Vassar now for Janet, no graduation in Brooklyn either. Who knew but she might become one of those amateur travellers, a book-

agent? or possibly go around, in an alpaca suit and cotton gloves, peddling buttons and glue? A shudder ran over her at the thought. To be sure, that would be an easy way to see the world; but she was no heroine of romance, and had little taste for adventure. Well, what then?

"I ought to go to some quiet little town a long way off, and try to teach music. Is there any place I've ever heard of that would suit me? Let me think."

She always said afterward that the word Quinnebasset came to her in a flash: but like most flashes it had been lying dormant in her brain for some time, indeed, ever since Mrs. Bangs had mentioned that her little brother was taken out of the asylum and carried to "the town of Poonoosac, near Quinnebasset." She knew nothing of Poonoosac; but Quinnebasset, as Mrs. Vail's birthplace, had always had a familiar sound. Brenda Harlow lived there now, and it seemed that Janet's own dead mother was born in that quaint little town.

"That's the very place; and cousin Brenda is my dear friend, though she isn't my cousin. But why do I tremble? I believe I am really more than half afraid of her. She is a dear old comfort when she chooses; and then, again, she's capable of doing such singular things. If she approves of my running away, she'll receive me with love and sympathy; but if she disapproves — Well, anyway, there's nothing better," said Janet, laying out her laces with desperate resolve.

And now, how much money did she possess? The question had not arisen before, for money was as much a matter of course to this child of luxury as the very air

she breathed. "Fifty-six dollars, twenty-five cents." She reckoned it over and over, taking it out of her pretty portemonnaie, and spreading it in her lap; then putting it back, and spreading it out again to make sure; then crushing it up in a heap, and pausing to reflect.

Car-fare? That would be something, not much; but then her board? How long could she support life on fifty dollars or less? An uneasy sense of vague and dreadful possibilities appalled her here. She actually could not guess within ten dollars a week what would be demanded for board; but this she did know, land-ladies are called grasping, heartless beings, grudging the very butter you spread on your bread, and it was not safe to venture near one of them without a full purse. She had a good many jewels of value; but land-ladies in Quinnebasset would not receive such things as legal tender, for nobody there would be able to melt them down, — unless, possibly, the blacksmith!

She spread out her jewels in a rich cluster, and let them sparkle all they would under the gaslight. It was a real pleasure to see their beauty; but now she wished they were each and all converted into dirty, prosy bank-bills. How much would a pawnbroker give for them? Once, in walking with Tim past a famous shop with three gilded balls, he had explained to her, that, dark as it looked on the outside, it was a sort of Aladdin's palace within; for several of its rooms were fairly lined with gems shut up in drawers under lock and key, waiting to be redeemed, or sold to the highest bidder. She had seen Jack Flint, a young friend of Tim's, going into this shop, and had ever after despised him: and she had said very harsh things

of pawnbrokers themselves ; but now they seemed to her like benefactors of the human race, especially provided to help unfortunate people over hard places. She would go out in the morning, — with her veil down, of course, — and ask one of these benevolent men to take her jewels for sweet charity's sake. She would only save out the plainest, a simple gold set with urn-shaped ear-rings, — old-fashioned things, but she was going where people knew nothing about fashions ! What of her watch ? To be sure, that was too elegant to keep ; but it had been such a dear, talkative friend always ! She kissed its white face fondly : no, she could not shut the coffin-lid down upon it forever, not yet ; she would wait a while for that.

At last, about daylight, the monstrous trunk was packed and stuffed to the brim, after a heterogeneous fashion that would have “made the cold shivers run down” Susan's back. It was ready ; but, like the grand family painting of the Vicar of Wakefield, what was to be done with it ? It would require two noisy hackmen to get it out of the house, with a great clattering of boots, which would surely wake Payson. Janet was not afraid of Mrs. Bangs and Susan, — both heavy sleepers, — or of Lavinia, who had not life enough when awake to scream at a mouse ; but Payson was like Papa Vail, ever on the alert. She had half a mind to take him into her confidence, for he was a good-natured fellow, and not likely to betray her to her father, whom he had his own reasons for disliking ; but could he be trusted to keep a secret from pretty Susan ?

While still pondering this, she heard a stir in the



"One long, silent embrace and a hushaby; then Janet fled noiselessly down the front stairs." — PAGE 73.

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back-yard, and, looking out, could just discern Payson coming from the stable with one of the horses harnessed to a light wagon. Going to Flatbush, no doubt; for she had heard him say the day before that he had "some garden-tools there, and one thing or 'nother."

Could any thing be more opportune? He would not return in less than two hours, and long before that she could slip out and order a hack.

But now, for the first time, her stout heart failed her. "Jamie, little Jamie!" As if he heard and understood, he smiled in his sleep, and held out both little hands toward her. One long, silent embrace, and a hushaby; then Janet fled noiselessly down the front-stairs. Bertha was in charge of Susan: she could not see the child, but she could bid good-by to her little hat and cloak in the hall-closet. She could take a last look at the story-room, and the sofa where her mother's dear head had lain!

Her mother! she loved her, yet loved her not, with one side of her nature longing for her inexpressibly; with the other, accusing her of weakness and downright cruelty. "She need not have deceived me so! She has let me live a beautiful, gilded lie!" said Janet bitterly.

But the next moment she had knelt, and was kissing the sofa-pillow with passionate feeling.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEPARTURE.

BY the the time Susan Dimmock awoke at the milk-man's call, Janet was half way to Fulton Ferry ; before Lavinia rang the very late breakfast-bell, she had loaned her jewels to a disinterested pawnbroker, received three hundred dollars in exchange, and started for Boston, resolute and wretched.

This is a free country, and nobody questioned the young girl's right to a seat in the cars ; nobody asked her whither she was going, or why she wore a thick veil, or what precious things she carried in her hand-bag so carefully guarded ; perhaps no one thought of her twice except the disappointed old lady who shared her seat, and made futile attempts to lead her into general conversation. "A proud thing ! One of the upper crust probably. I'd like, for the curiosity of it, to know what her dress cost a yard," thought the old lady, relapsing into injured silence.

Janet sat for the first hour in trembling dread of meeting some old acquaintance, and had resolved in that case to remark incidentally, "Oh, good morning ! I'm taking a little trip to Boston : are you going there too?" The man she particularly dreaded was her father's confidential clerk, Mr. Madison Tukey ; but

as the cars rattled on, and no familiar face appeared, she began to draw her breath naturally, and at the same time to become consciously hungry. "Why, I haven't eaten any thing since lunch yesterday! How nice those cheesecakes were, and how afraid I was that little Bertha would make herself ill over them! Dear little Bertha!" It was of no use trying to think: her over-strained brain could only repeat the old ideas in a strange medley.

"No father, no mother, no home! Never travelled before without father. So odd not to have him brushing the dust off my dress! Last time I went with him, he took me to the Severances. I never liked those Severances. Now, this is what you call running away, I suppose, — flitting. What will Tim say to it? What will Brenda say? I'm afraid they'll think I came in a hurry, without stopping to think; but that isn't so. I was very deliberate indeed. Why, last night was six weeks long! in fact, it's six *months* since I read that letter from mother! Time is nothing: it's the amount of thinking you do that makes a period long or short."

At nightfall of the second day the cars came to a final halt at the picturesque town of Poonoosac.

"The end of all things," thought our young traveller, as the passengers filed out, and she found herself on a crowded platform, with her cherished handbag upon her arm.

"Quinnebasset stage!" called out a rough-looking official in gray ulster and cap, before her trembling fingers had had time to search for her check.

Was *that* the Quinnebasset stage? It looked like a

“Black Maria,” with side-doors like two pitfalls set upright. But if the stage dismayed her, her trunk dismayed the driver.

“Guess your baggage will have to wait over,” said he, viewing it with unfeigned astonishment, as it loomed up in gigantic proportions on a wheelbarrow, attracting the attention of all by-standers.

Janet shrank into the shadow, feeling very much like the unhappy owner of the white elephant. But that stage! Would she be drawn up and into it by means of a rope? or what was the usual mode of entrance? She watched the passengers — six of them — scramble in one after another, then took her life in her hand, and plunged in herself.

It was dusk; but the gentleman at her left had startled her a minute ago by his resemblance to Mr. Madison Tukey, and she hardly dared look at him now. During her entire journey, every dark-haired man, tanned by the March wind, had invariably reminded her of the same dreaded individual.

It was a breakneck ride; and, as she gazed out of the dingy coach-window into the yawning abysses in the road, it seemed as if there must have been some grand upheaval of nature, and chaos had come again.

“Guess you ain’t used to riding when the frost is coming out: it *is* muddy,” remarked her next neighbor, a woman with a basket of eggs in her lap, as Janet pitched forward, nearly upsetting the baby in front. “Hadn’t you better hold on to the strap?” she suggested, laughing sociably. “Going to Quinnebasset Village? Any acquainted there? Been travelling far? Going to stay long? Did you tell the driver where to

put you out?" queried the woman by jerks, as the coach courtesied in the mud.

Then, when they had gone a mile or two farther, the catechist began again. "I belong in the village, Miss —, and my name is Hackett; and if you're a stranger, and want information, I can give it to you."

Janet forced herself to reply that she was going to Mrs. Satterlee's; but, though her tone was low, she was sure every soul in the coach heard her.

"Satterlee? Why, you don't say! She that was Osaforj Jones? Married rich, and lived in Boston a while in great style. Poor thing, her husband failed. You ain't any relation to either of 'em, are you? Oh, well! I didn't know but you might be. Well, failing is no disgrace, unless you fail a-purpose," said Mrs. Hackett with commendable caution. "But it's been hard for Osaforj, left a widow and obliged to take boarders. I don't know what she *would* have done if it hadn't have been for Brendy Harlow."

Here the tanned gentleman at Janet's left cleared his throat attentively. "Yes, judge, that's so. She wouldn't have had the heart to come and set up for herself if it hadn't been for somebody to encourage her along. Brendy is a great hand to put things through, and Osaforj leans on her for advice: though I don't suppose Brendy knows much about cooking; that ain't to be expected of these folks that write — Why, here we are now, close by the gate! We've been talking so steady for the last mile or two that I never noticed whereabouts we were."

Janet's heart gave a sudden bound. Not suspecting that her hour of trial was so near, she had not

yet braced herself to meet it. The stage had stopped at the entrance to the village, before a pretty brown cottage, whose lighted windows sent cheery rays into the front-yard and beyond it.

“I can’t go in, I can’t go in,” thought Janet. But it was first necessary to get out; and in her agitation she so far forgot the dangers of the Black Maria that she would have fallen headlong if the judge had not lifted her gallantly, and set her down on dry land, remarking, —

“The soil is sandy here, miss, and won’t wet your feet.”

In fact, they seemed to have entered another latitude; for here was dry land instead of mud, the brown grass was undergoing thorough repairs, and some of last year’s withered leaves were skipping across the road in a gale.

The judge opened the gate, and let Janet walk in before him; then rang the bell for her, bowed, and entered the house, leaving her standing on the broad door-stone, gazing defiantly at the scraper. Did beggars feel like this? Heaven help them, then! What was there for her on the other side of that blank brown door? Never before had she been afraid of her good friend Brenda — but now, moment of fate! the door was opening.

“Yes, ma’am, Miss Harlow *is* in. Will you walk into the parlor?” replied the smiling maid. Brenda had two rooms of her own, but the new maid was in the habit of forgetting it.

The parlor was occupied; in fact, all the boarders were in it except the one Janet wished to see. She advanced, blushing and hesitating.

What right had she to intrude upon these strangers? A tearful lady peeped out at her over the black border of a mourning pocket-handkerchief, while two other individuals looked up and smiled courteously, and the judge rose and bowed.

With a murmured apology the intruder drew backward into the hall. Brenda was descending the front-stairs in her floating way, something like one of the autumn-leaves in the yard, borne along by a breeze. Seeing Janet, she stopped short, uttered a little cry, and then flew into her arms.

“Why, Janet, Janet Vail!”

“How do you do, cousin Brenda?” returned the unexpected guest as quietly as if she were in the habit of dropping down in this way almost any fine day.

“Why, dear child, what does it mean? Where’s your mother? Any one ill?”

“Oh, no! I came rather hurriedly, but will soon explain,” said Janet in a composed tone, for the benefit of the boarders.

“Here, get me up-stairs as fast as you can, and calm me,” said Brenda, utterly regardless of being overheard.

Janet’s first act on reaching Miss Harlow’s chamber was to lock the door. Her manner was collected, but she trembled violently. An escaped convict could hardly have suffered more from apprehension. Brenda fluttered about her, helping her off with her wraps, catching her breath as she repeated eagerly, —

“Why, *what* is all this? Will you explain?”

“Brenda Harlow,” said Janet, confronting her with her last dying spark of courage, “you know what it

is as well as I. You knew of the letter I was to have last Wednesday."

"Letter? letter? Well, well, dear, but what if I did?" said Miss Harlow, dropping her violet eyes.

Janet saw her advantage.

"Yes, cousin Brenda, you've always known, and you never told me; yet you pretended to be my friend."

"Janet, Janet, I was under bonds!"

"Oh, you were! And was Tim under bonds too? Was that why he ran away when I needed him most?"

"Hush, child! not one word against Tim," said Brenda, turning around with her arms full of towels. "He fully meant to be with you last Tuesday, but was detained. When you see the letter I had from him last night, you'll understand how deeply he feels for you. Oh! but you saw him yesterday, of course: he was to take the Tuesday night train."

"Was he? No, I didn't see him. I didn't know about it, or I would have waited," said Janet blankly.

"Oh! well, bathe your face, dear: it will refresh you," said Brenda, offering a match-safe and a pin-cushion; for she had evidently lost her wits, — a rare thing for the alert little lady. "Now, Janet, go on with your story. Tell me how you felt when you got the letter. Poor child, it must have been a shock! And what sort of an interview did you have with your father? And are matters any clearer between you?"

"My father! Why, cousin Brenda, I haven't seen him. I suppose he is in Philadelphia."

"And your mother gone too! Why, Janet, Janet, it can't be — you didn't — run away!"

It was in vain for Brenda to throw up her little hands with such a pretence of surprise: a twinkle of the truthful eye, a quiver of the honest mouth, betrayed her.

"Brenda Harlow, you needn't make believe! You knew, the moment you saw me, that I'd run away."

A prolonged fit of coughing prevented any reply to this searching remark. After recovering by the aid of a lozenge, Brenda picked up a few articles she had scattered on the carpet, and, being by that time perfectly composed, exclaimed, with all proper severity, —

"Janet, do you mean to stand up here boldly, and affirm that you've actually run away from home?"

"It wasn't my home."

"And you come to me for shelter and protection?"

"Yes'm," replied Janet, her courage going again.

"Janet Vail, do you take me for a woman who will aid and abet in such conduct as this?"

"I take you for a woman with a great warm heart," said Janet, quaking with fright; for Brenda's face had a hard look, such as it might be supposed to wear in turning a troublesome book-agent away from the door.

"You headstrong, reckless girl! Still, I do pity you."

"I thought you would: it was my only hope," said Janet pleadingly.

"But the question isn't whether I pity you, child: it's whether I have a right to harbor you."

"O cousin Brenda!"

"For, of course, your parents will be searching for you, half-distracted."

"You forget, Brenda, I have no parents. Mother

will grieve, that is, at first; but as for father, — oh, don't fret about him!"

"There it is, Janet; there it is again, — that old root of bitterness. You should have talked with him frankly, and told him what you meant to do."

"Why, if I had, he wouldn't have let me come," replied Janet naively. "You can't argue with him; he bears you down with a torrent of words, and gets his own way: you know it, Brenda."

"Yes, yes," said the little lady irresolutely. "Poor child! it has been hard for you to kick against the pricks."

"I don't call it exactly pricks, those things you can help," said Janet doggedly.

"But, dear, the Lord gave you your adopted home."

"Yes; and he gave me the power to leave it too."

"You little sophist!" said Brenda, coughing again for want of an argument.

"And he must have known I would leave it, for he gave me just the sort of disposition that can't bear every thing. I put it to you, Brenda: could *you* bear it, if you knew you made your parents both unhappy? Mother said I was a bone of contention between her and father: she said so just before she left home."

Brenda drew the girl's head down upon her shoulder, and the touch of her hand was very tender as she said, "We won't talk about it any more now: we're too excited to talk reasonably. I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll call this a visit, and you shall stay here till your mother goes home. I'll write her to-morrow."

"If you do, Brenda Harlow!" —

"There, there: we were not going to talk. It's

nearly tea-time, and I intend to march you down to see the boarders. You're paying me a visit, remember. Your hair is smooth, and here's a white tie for your neck. It's a new one. Pin it on."

"Brenda, must I face all these people again to-night? But I'm in your hands; and you're so good to me, on the whole, that I can't complain. Only present me by my real name: don't forget that," said Janet with dignity. "My name is Keith."

CHAPTER XI.

THE BOARDERS.

JANET was ushered into the parlor, and introduced so gracefully as "Miss Keith of Brooklyn," that she began to think she was not a disreputable runaway, after all, but a young lady of distinction.

"Miss Keith, this is my old friend Judge Davenport."

The judge shook hands with a fatherly smile, spoke of the wild ride they had had together, and thought, "A bright, unassuming little girl. I like the looks of her eye."

"And this is Miss Sanders, who honors the family by talking metaphysics. Matilda, have you a copy of Fichte in your pocket?"

Miss Sanders inclined her classic head graciously, thinking, "She probably knows something, or she would not be Miss Harlow's friend."

"And this is Mr. Teague, who keeps us informed about politics."

Mr. Teague, a large, somewhat awkward young man, pocketed his newspaper, and then shook hands in a way half-shy, half-inquiring, as hoping Miss Keith hadn't any "nonsense" about her, and wouldn't expect him to make himself agreeable.

“And this,” went on Brenda in an indulgent tone, as if commending a good child, “this is Mr. Kyte, who takes care of all the ladies.”

It seemed probable that he did. His limited forehead retreated from his handsome nose with an apparent sense of unworthiness, and a straight and narrow path ran exactly through the middle of his hair. His gold-bowed eye-glasses flew off to the farther end of the room as he made a low and elegant bow over Miss Keith’s hand, and murmured his ecstasy at meeting her.

“And this is Mrs. Whippowill, who” — Brenda faltered, unable at that moment to recall any characteristic thing Mrs. Whippowill ever did but cry. She smiled mournfully now, and was in deep black, with a trailing skirt as long as the tail of a peacock before the Flood, — taking it for granted that the tails of birds were as much longer as the lives of men in those good old antediluvian days.

“And now, if the introductions are all over, my friends, you are at liberty to go out to tea,” said Miss Harlow, dropping a courtesy.

There was a universal smile, and a cheerful movement toward the dining-room. Here, after being presented to a refined and cordial landlady, who did not look capable of “grasping” or “grudging,” Miss Keith had a seat appointed her between Miss Harlow and Mr. Teague at the side of the table known as “chocolate-corner.”

It was a pleasant, low-ceiled room, with dado, bay-window, and sideboard; and the table glowed with a crimson cloth and painted china dishes. Judge Daven-

port — who, it seemed, was the landlady's uncle — sat at the foot of the table, with his niece's small son Teddy at his right hand, while the little girl Katie, a pink of propriety, had a high chair beside her mamma.

“Chocolate-corner” seemed a quiet retreat. Cousin Brenda talked to Mrs. Satterlee's beautiful children or to Mr. Kyte, and did not embarrass Miss Keith by any especial attentions. Mr. Teague was equally considerate, and, after a remark to the judge about “specie basis,” confined himself strictly to his plate.

Janet, who had been all her life accustomed at meal-times to feel her father's “gimblet eyes boring into her soul,” as Mrs. Bangs forcibly expressed it, was glad to enjoy the delicious supper in peace.

Mrs. Whippowill, who sat on the “long side” of the table, next chocolate-corner, informed Mr. Teague sadly that she had “just returned from a visit to the graveyard.”

“Rather sloppy walking, I should say,” was the unfeeling rejoinder.

Miss Keith gathered that this heartless young man was the high-school teacher, and the metaphysical Miss Sanders from Boston his assistant. It was the first time Janet had ever met so young a lady as Miss Sanders who seemed so painfully well informed. She radiated knowledge around the tea-table as naturally as the hanging-lamps radiated light; and, when she began to discuss woman suffrage with full knowledge of dates and statistics, the new-comer gazed at her with admiration bordering on awe.

Mrs. Whippowill plaintively suggested that “women should seek for no rights except the right to be loved

and cherished ;” whereupon Mr. Kyte, as a champion of the sex, affirmed gallantly that “ women ought to be loved and cherished, and when they were not loved and cherished it — why, it wounded his feelings : it did now, really.”

While the judge and Miss Sanders argued, he threw in other remarks equally brilliant, and quite as much to the point. Janet saw that he favored both sides of the question impartially, and talked with perfectly disinterested enthusiasm, for nobody listened.

“ Yes, dear, some people call him the learned fool,” said cousin Brenda, as they went up-stairs after tea. “ His brain is very small, and has been over-educated ; and, while he has a good deal of heterogeneous knowledge, he is quite incapable of applying it. He is wealthy, but can’t take care of his money, so his friends have appointed a guardian for him, and he boards in the country for his health ; a dear, harmless, chivalrous soul, an old friend of Oscaforia’s and mine. You mustn’t laugh at him, dear, for we love him.”

“ Did you think I was laughing, cousin Brenda ? No, indeed ! your people are all charming, and you don’t know how I enjoyed the chat at the table. And as for your room, — *may* I poke that beautiful wood-fire ? ”

“ Yes ; and now look out of the window, and give your opinion of the landscape, Janet.”

The house stood facing a garden known in the village as the heater-piece, for it ended in an acute angle made by the meeting of two roads. The moon was rising, and from the front-window Janet could see little patches of snow lying like stray lambs along the fence and in the hollows of the garden. Beyond was

the river, still locked in ice, and fringed on both banks with evergreen or skeleton trees.

“O cousin Brenda! I like it all, even that graveyard in the distance, with white stones like doves’ wings.”

“Do you?” said Miss Harlow, stealing up to the young girl and kissing her. “I was afraid you might be repelled by the gloomy outlook at this muddy season. But I do think the house is pleasant; and I have the two best rooms in it, and have done my best to embower myself, you see,” said she, pointing with her tiny forefinger to the flowering plants and trailing vines that graced the walls.

A fine portrait of Edward Harlow, draped with ivy, attracted Janet’s attention; but she purposely avoided looking at it, and turned to Mr. Braxton’s picture which hung near it, exclaiming, —

“Ah! here is Tim spying upon us from under his shaggy brows. That’s what I call a handsome face.”

“M — m — m!” ejaculated Miss Harlow, who was a bit of an artist. “A striking face; but one eye is higher than the other. and those deep curves around his mouth remind me of circles you make in the water by throwing in a pebble. The features are contradictory: chin hard and unforgiving; eye exquisitely kind. You’d trust him with untold gold, and then probably be sorry for it, he is so apt to leave things at loose ends.”

“Now, cousin Brenda.” said Janet, not well pleased with this commentary, “you’re like Papa Vail: you think if a man drops his handkerchief and gloves he can’t succeed in business. Just see how well Tim’s coat fits, and how trim he looks,” she added defiantly,

though without any discoverable connection. "He's like mother in being fastidiously nice as well as careless. And, as for kindness, do you know any other young man who takes a Roman-Catholic magazine for his servant-girl? O Tim, Tim, to think you don't belong to me! To think I've lost you, and lost everybody, and am all alone in the world!"

She did not pause to think how her words would strike home to Miss Harlow, till that bright little lady turned her head away with a sigh.

"Now, cousin Brenda, I didn't mean to remind you : do forgive me."

"It's the very sight of you that reminds me, dear, even if you don't speak a word. You see, the roses haven't bloomed in my way particularly of late ; but then it's the wrong season of the year to expect them, unless one carries a little conservatory along with one, which I haven't exactly contrived how to manage since" —

Here the sentence was choked by something half way between a sob and a cough. "You know," she added presently, "Edward has been gone from me a whole year, but I haven't learned to live without him yet : it seems sometimes as if I never should learn." Here she broke down a moment, and sobbed on Janet's shoulders.

"You're good for the heartache, child. I don't know why it is, but I can talk to you out of the deep places, and always could ; and you so young too! I never say a word to Mrs. Satterlee. She has her own trials ; and, besides, it wouldn't do to bring gloom into her home when I came determined to help."

“You dear, sweet woman ! I’m sure I’ve never halt known how hard it has been for you to lose your brother, and how you’re always fighting against your grief.”

Miss Harlow turned quite pale as she replied, —

“No, Janet, I’ve done fighting against it : I can’t conquer. All I can do is to turn away from my grief deliberately as if it were a sin. When I do that, the weight is lifted for me ; because then it is our Father’s business, not mine.”

“Is that what faith means ?” thought Janet.

“I find there are two sides to sorrow, my dear, — the earth-side and the heaven-side. When I look up I can bear it : when I look down I go wild !”

Here there was a silken rustle and a dainty tap at the door. “Come,” said Brenda in an every-day tone ; whereupon Mrs. Whippowill glided in, followed by several feet of rustling crape, and wafting a strong odor of santalina. Janet remembered Brenda’s dislike of santalina.

“I’m so sad this evening,” lisped the widow in low, broken tones : “I’m constantly thinking of my dear, dear Jun.”

Janet wondered if this was her late husband, and if his name had been John.

“Sea-foam, bubbles, shadows : yes, we are passing away ; we return, we return no more.”

“Have a chair,” said Miss Harlow civilly, all her own grief thrown back on her heart by this whirlwind of woe.

“Sea-foam, bubbles, shadows,” repeated the persistent mourner, trying the chair with gentle caution, as if to assure herself it was not made of spun glass.

“Ah, Miss Keith! it’s too bad of me to intrude so upon your first evening here; but Miss Harlow knows my moods, she bears with me. Ah, Miss Harlow! it’s seventeen months this very day since Jun died, and I would I were lying in the grave beside him.”

This tender wail might have melted a stone, so Janet thought; but it made no apparent impression upon Miss Harlow, who merely donned her eyeglasses, and began to sew: she never sewed unless she felt cross.

“How well I remember Jun’s last words to me! ‘Don’t mourn for me, Calista: this is a weary world, and I shall be better off in heaven.’”

Brenda stooped to pick up her spool, an amused look creeping around the corners of her mouth. She knew Calista had made it such a “weary world” for Jun, that he had met death with a smile; and it was devoutly to be hoped he *was* better off in heaven.

“Cousin Brenda is as unfeeling as Mr. Teague,” thought Janet indignantly.

“Ah, Miss Harlow!” went on the widow, “how I envy you your strength of character in bearing your sorrow! but, believe me, a brother is not a husband.”

This was so manifestly true that no answer seemed needed; and Miss Harlow went on thrusting her needle savagely into the cambric, without speaking.

“Not that all widows feel as I do,” added Mrs. Whippowill, after an affecting pause, “or widowers either. Now, Judge Davenport” —

“Janet,” said Brenda abruptly, “will you open the door for Mrs. Whippowill’s little dog?”

“Naughty Fido,” said his mistress, caressing the little creature as he ran in and bounded upon her lap.

“The judge’s wife died not two months before my Jun, and he seemed to mourn her; but now you see him on the street, smiling, and tipping his hat to young ladies.”

“Doesn’t he tip it to widows and old maids too? He ought to,” said Brenda demurely.

Mrs. Whippowill peeped over the black border of her handkerchief, to make sure no sarcasm was intended; then went on re-assured, —

“Still I don’t believe all I hear. He is considered light-minded; but some things I’ve always said I wouldn’t believe, unless — well, unless I hear them from your own lips, Miss Harlow.”

“For instance, what?” asked Brenda, her eyes dancing with pure fun.

“Well, — if you urge it, — I don’t usually repeat gossip, — but I *have* heard he calls here to see *you*! As if he could be so frivolous as that!”

“Thank you! you are very complimentary,” said Brenda, rising, and sweeping a courtesy.

“Oh, Miss Harlow, what a wit! We all know you’re highly intellectual, and I don’t mean it would be frivolous to come to see *you*, you know; but it *would* be frivolous for a man of his age to be — to be serious, you know. But has he called? Do tell me, has he now, really?”

In her over-anxiety she forgot the possible brittleness of the easy-chair, and rose and sank again with full weight upon the springs, at the same time dropping her handkerchief, and revealing, alas! a pair of dry eyes.

Janet understood it all now, and enjoyed watching Brenda’s adroitness in avoiding a direct answer to the

lady's questions. Indeed, Mrs. Whippowill was kept on the rack for ten minutes, and went away at last no wiser than when she came.

"There," laughed Brenda, flying to open a window, and let out the odor of santalina, "she didn't learn any thing, did she? Jealous of *me*, the silly creature, at *my* time of life! The judge has called here twice, — once to borrow a book, and once to return it; but I wouldn't condescend to explain."

"I want to tell you," said Janet gravely, "that woman's handkerchief slipped down so I saw her eyes, and she hadn't been crying."

"You dear, profound, original creature!" laughed Brenda: "her tears are not held very sacred in this house; they are mostly dry ones. Still, I dare say there are times when she really mourns for 'Jun,' and feels remorse: I don't see how it can be otherwise; for she treated him shamefully while he lived, and he was one of the saints of the earth. But come, dear, sit down in this rocker, and take me in your lap. Jun's widow exasperates me so with her falsetto voice, that I need a rest. What do you think of home in a boarding-house? Unless I shut myself up in my 'den,' where I write, I'm liable to these interruptions at all hours."

Another tap at the door, and Miss Sanders put in her head — the head that was said to resemble Sappho's — to say the "new boarder" had come.

Miss Harlow had slipped out of Janet's lap, and was sitting with dignity upon a hassock.

"Well, now, who is the new boarder? I forget her name."

“ A young gentleman named Phenix, who is to study law with the judge. You remember he had to leave off teaching at Poonoosac, because the girls found him entirely too fascinating.”

“ Oh, folly ! ” said Brenda.

“ Now, Janet,” she continued, as the door closed again, “ I’m going to be exclusive while you’re here. We’ll lock ourselves in, and read and talk, and have a good time.”

“ While I am here ! ” thought Janet, with a grown-up smile. “ *Can* Brenda be so cruel as to think of sending me away ? ”

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. BANGS AND TIM.

MEANWHILE Janet's flight had made just the sensation at home that might have been expected. Naturally Mrs. Bangs was the first explorer and discoverer. Hearing little Jamie crying quite perseveringly, she went into Janet's room to see what it meant, and found the little fellow all alone, vociferating for "Dinny."

"I guess Dinny is in the closet," said the good woman, catching him up, and walking about with him on a tour of observation.

"Why, where is she, sure enough? There, baby, baby, don't you cry," said she, thrusting him, head downward, into several bureau-drawers, then twitching him up again hastily.

Bureau, desk, and table empty; closet bare; trunk gone.

"If this don't beat all!" cried the widow, appalled. "Gone, bag and baggage! Well, I've lived in this world three and thirty years, and never knew before that I was a natural-born fool!" added she, unconsciously squeezing the unhappy Jamie against one of her whalebones. "Why didn't I watch that girl last night? I might have known by the steady kind of

shine in her eyes, and that resolute look round her mouth, that she'd be up to something. — Sh, baby! Well, I don't blame her a bit; but why under the sun didn't she tell *me*? I'd have helped her off! Well, there: I don't know as I would, though," pursued Mrs. Bangs, brought to a stand-still; for the desperate Jamie had crept around under her left arm, and was sliding down to the floor. She caught him up by the back, like a young kitten, and took him into Susan's chamber.

"Well, Susan Dimmock, here's your baby. Jinny's gone and left us!"

"Not before breakfast?" said the bewildered nurse, turning around from the looking-glass to receive Jamie, who sprang joyfully into her arms.

"Yes; and I don't blame her a mite. It wasn't her duty to stand what she's stood from that man. But how she ever got out of the house with that big trunk!"

"Not her *Sally Togus* trunk? And what man are you talking about? Do speak slower," said Susan, giving the now tranquil infant her brush to play with, while she pinned on her collar. She must not neglect her toilet; for, as soon as she could fairly understand what had happened, of course she should go and tell Payson.

"This is something that ain't to be spoken of, not yet," said Mrs. Bangs, divining her thoughts. "I shouldn't have told even you, Susan, if I could have helped it. You see, Jinny has found out about her parentage, and that's what started her off."

"Oh, what a shame! and she the flower of the whole family! But where has she gone to?"

"That's more than I know; still, I ain't a mite con-

cerned but what she can take care of herself," declared Mrs. Bangs, loyally concealing her anxiety. "Most likely she's been to talk it over with aunt Rossy. Anyway, I'll slip over there and see. Only you've got to promise me you won't breathe a word of this till I get back."

Susan promised reluctantly, borne down as usual by the stronger will and sounder judgment.

"Though I can't see the sense of keeping it so private, when it's got to come out some time; and, in my opinion, Payson ought to be starting off after her this minute."

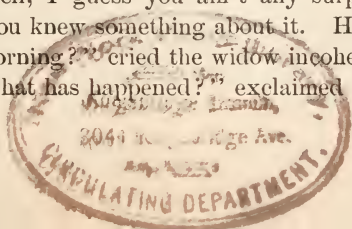
Mrs. Bangs deigned no reply, but pursued her way down the back-stairs, tying an old blue scarf on her head as she went. She paused to take a sharp look about the house, then hurried on to aunt Rossy's. Before she had time to ring, Timothy Braxton opened the door on his way out.

"What! you home again, Mr. Braxton? Why, you're just the one I wanted to see," said she, stumbling forward, and clutching at the door-post for support. The grace of her attitude was only equalled by the picturesqueness of her costume, — Lavinia's red shawl pinned askew across her shoulders, and the blue scarf set awry upon her head.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Bangs: you are early; come in," said the young man, seeing at once that something else was amiss, as well as the shawl and scarf.

"Well, I guess you ain't any surprised: you look as if you knew something about it. Has she been here this morning?" cried the widow incoherently.

"What has happened?" exclaimed Tim, thinking at



once of Janet, who had scarcely been out of his mind since he arrived last night in the midnight train. "I was just on my way to your house."

"Oh, then you *don't* know! Jinny's cleared out, Mr. Braxton: started for no knowing where!"

"Good heavens! you can't mean it!" It was his turn now to clutch at the door-post.

"Yes, she's gone. You know they pitched upon her birthday—that was yesterday—to break her heart, and let her know she didn't belong to 'em; and it came upon her so sudden"—

"Have you the least suspicion where she would be likely to go?" asked Mr. Braxton, walking off toward Mr. Vail's house at such strides that Mrs. Bangs was forced to run in order to keep up with him.

"Oh! you won't find a note or a scrap of writing, for I've searched well. Your sister *meant* right, Mr. Braxton; but it was very unforeseen of her, stirring Jinny up just now when"—

"Where is her father? What does he say?"

"Oh! Mr. Vail don't know a word: he's off to Philadelphia."

"Then she hasn't gone that way. Tell me all you know, Mrs. Bangs. When did you see her last?"

"Well, it was last evening, about six o'clock; and of all the catechisms I had to go through with! She wanted to know about her father and mother, and especially that brother. I can't help mistrusting—you see she was so interested, when I told her he was adopted by somebody in Maine."

Mr. Braxton stopped short, and his knitted brows relaxed.

"You are right, Mrs. Bangs. She has gone to Quinnebasset!"

"Just what I think, — to Brendy Harlow's. That's the way it struck me, when I'd had a minute to think; and I'm proper glad you and I agree," said Mrs. Bangs, drawing her first long breath; for they were standing now at Mr. Vail's gate.

"We won't make a stir about this," said Mr. Braxton, looking thoughtfully upward at Janet's chamber-window. "I will despatch to Miss Harlow, and demand an answer the moment Miss Janet arrives. But I don't see the necessity of alarming her mother: do you? And as for her father, — well," added he, after a pause, "it may be as well that Mr. Vail is away just now."

"Just what *I* think! He'd set the police on her track, likely as any way: he's a man without a morsel of feeling. Now do you blame Jinny for running off and leaving him? I don't. As I said to Susan just now, I never would have stood from mortal man what she has stood from him! Not but what I believe in grace," added the preacher's widow, correcting herself; "but I believe in grit too."

"I'm glad of it," said Tim, smiling, "and I know you'll stand a good friend to Miss Janet. She is young, and never once thought what a scandal she was bringing upon the family. Of course we can't have everybody talking about this. How shall we manage it, Mrs. Bangs? Can you possibly keep the servants in ignorance just for the present?"

"Of course I can, sir: I've told nobody yet but Susan, and she's completely under my thumb. I'll

just go in and lock up Jinny's chamber; and by and by, — about noon, say, — I'll happen to mention that she's gone out of town. I'll make it all right, Mr. Braxton: don't you worry a bit."

Tim thanked her with an eloquent look, and went to send both a despatch and a letter to Brenda Harlow.

"I never saw any mortal with such a winning smile, and that I'll maintain," thought Mrs. Bangs, divesting herself of scarf and shawl in the back entry. "He's some like his sister Harriet; only her smile is skin-deep, as you may say. How pale he turned round the mouth, though, when I told him about Jinny! Well, we'll try not to worry. Whatever she's up to, her red hair will carry her through."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE KEY.

MR. VAIL arrived at home next morning in a very genial mood, prepared for the long-delayed scene with Janet. Mrs. Bangs had overawed him the other night by her high-tragedy airs, but he would not be interfered with again: he must and would see his daughter, who was suffering and in need of his comforting presence.

Of course she had weighed all the facts by this time, and, knowing what a trial she had always been, would naturally expect to lose her place in the family, become a sort of poor relation, and finally be cut off with a shilling. But he had glorious news: he should say, "Come to me, Janet, and let me dry your tears. Awkward, plebeian, and plain as you are, I still regard you as my daughter; and I have made you a birthday gift fit for a princess."

The truth was, he had just been to Pennsylvania for the purpose of investing a hundred thousand dollars for her in mining-shares. It adds greatly to a young lady's attractions to possess money in her own right, he thought; and this amount he could very well afford, indeed, could have afforded much more. He confessed to himself, as he walked up the gravel-path,

and cast an eye about his own grounds, that his establishment was almost niggardly for a man of his wealth. He had always been careful to explain that his wife's poor health demanded a very simple style of living: still, if he had supposed this statement was not generally accepted, he would have doubled his expenses at once.

"For I am any thing but a miserly man," thought Rufus Vail, his heart swelling at the thought of his own magnanimity. "And now for Janet."

But little Bertha met him in the hall with the tearful story, "My Jinnet's gone away!"

When he learned that this was true, his magnanimity flew to the winds. "Twenty-four hours lost!" he cried, storming the dining-room, and arraigning cook and nursery-maid like culprits before the sideboard. "Hadn't either of you sense enough to stop her? Explain yourselves. I will have an explanation. Is this the way you care for my interests when I am gone? Is this why I was told Wednesday night she couldn't be seen? Had she gone then? *When* did she go?"

Mrs. Bangs, in particular, had reason to rue the day she was born. Mr. Vail was immensely relieved to learn that Janet's flitting had not been made public; but, though he owed this to Mrs. Bangs, none the less did he rave at her, and when this magnanimous man raved his tongue was sharper than Saladin's cimeter of Damascus steel. It was the first time the preacher's widow had suffered such an indignity. Beyond "boring her soul with his gimblet eyes," and delivering a few lordly lectures on fricasseed chicken and

fancy roasts, he had generally treated her with reasonable respect.

“Well, sir, if you’ve got through,” said the incensed woman, improving a pause, “I’d like to make one remark: You needn’t pay me my month’s wages, sir; for I sha’n’t give you any warning. I’m off to-morrow morning out of this house, sir, if I have the use of my limbs.”

The trembling Susan admired, but dared not imitate: she could only join Lavinia in crying as Mrs. Bangs proceeded that afternoon to pack her trunk.

“I *hope* I’ve done right,” said the widow dubiously; “but it’s what you might call a triumph of grit over grace, and I ain’t sure husband would have approved. I do hate to leave the religious privileges of Brooklyn; but it’s done now, whether or no. Oh, well! I’m an independent woman; and, thank the Lord, I’ve got own folks in Quinnebasset.”

But there was another person far more grossly wronged than Mrs. Bangs, who had not her power of breaking away from the Vail family; and this was Timothy Braxton. His brother-in-law waylaid him on the street, exclaiming angrily, —

“A word with you, Mr. Braxton! I demand an apology from you, sir.”

But Tim was too cool by half.

“Well?” said he, swinging a key on his forefinger as he walked on.

“Stop, sir! Would you insinuate that you don’t understand, — that you have not interfered in my family affairs? Dare you deny that you helped my daughter away?”

"I do deny it," was the quiet reply: "I do not even know where she is."

"Mr. Braxton, I will not be put off with subterfuges. You may not know where she is at this precise moment, but you do know where she intended to go. She consulted you, of course, you contemptible eavesdropper! Tell me now, this instant, where to look."

Tim was human, and his strong arms ached to seize upon this slight, supple man, and hurl him into the street; but his "nobler self arose in him and fought."

"Mr. Vail, I do not know her plans: I say this once for all, and shall not repeat it. *You* know whether my word is to be trusted."

Mr. Vail did know, had always known; for the quality he hated most in Tim was his "incorrigible and losing honesty." He had really thought he must be in league with Janet, but now that he plainly saw his mistake he would not retract: it was easier to keep on railing. Strangers passing the two gentlemen on the street wondered if the thin one had gone out of his head, and the stout one was stone deaf.

Tim dared not lift his eyes to Mr. Vail's face, lest he should be tempted again to knock him down.

"Patience!" thought he: "I should kill him if I touched him, — my sister's husband." Presently, unable to bear more, he made a sudden dash into a barber's shop, leaving his tormentor gazing after him in surprise. In Tim's haste he carelessly dropped the key he had been holding; and Mr. Vail, who never, in his wildest excitement, lost the faculty of observation, heard the key drop, and picked it up. "Belongs to his post-office box," thought he; and as Mr. Braxton did

not appear again, he pocketed the key, and strode on, still thinking of Janet. What a mortification if she could not be found! He was not without a certain affection for the young girl who had called him father, but the disgrace if she should not return would far outweigh the grief.

“Why, it’s the most audacious thing! I can not and will not endure it. It will look to the world as if she had been ill-treated at home! She shall be sorry for this when I get her back,” said he, knitting his brows, and striding on so recklessly that he nearly walked over a little girl drawing a doll’s carriage. At sight of the child’s tears he stopped instantly, said, “Did I hurt you, my darling?” picked up the prostrate doll, and gave its tiny mistress a piece of silver to buy it a sash. Rufus Vail had one soft side to his nature: he adored little girls. But next moment the fierce look had come back again, and he had resumed his old train of thought. He must begin the search for Janet cautiously, secretly: he would employ detectives, and not have her name noised abroad in the papers. Detectives! It was well that the young fugitive, just then steaming out of Boston, had no suspicion of her father’s dark designs.

She had heard of the dreadful beings who “shadow” dishonest people from street to street and town to town, disguised in false whiskers and wigs; but, of course, they never shadowed respectable, innocent young girls!

“If I only had a clew! It’s useless to consult a detective unless I give him a clew,” thought Rufus Vail. “She may have gone to Texas, or drowned

herself in East River; though I know better than to believe she would do any thing rash."

He had always systematically underrated Janet, but it now appeared that he had abundant faith in her strong good sense.

"She would never dare go to her mother's relatives in Boston, or to mine in Vermont: still, she is not the girl to trust herself to entire strangers. She must have gone to somebody she knows. Plenty of people I can think of. The Severances of New Jersey? She never liked them. The Grahams and Scantlins of Troy? Doesn't know them well enough. Brenda Harlow? Just the person!" exclaimed Mr. Vail, swinging his arms. "Somehow the idea occurred to me while I was talking with Tim, and it grows on me too. Would Brenda harbor her? Depends on her opinion of me. She liked me once; but there's something uncompromising about the woman, and I saw when she was here a year ago that I had lost ground. Refused my magnanimous offer of a home! owing to Tim, no doubt. The coolness that rascal assumes toward me is abominable, places me at a disadvantage, has turned her against me.

"If Janet has gone to Quinnebasset, — and I know she has, — that woman *may* harbor her: I couldn't have believed it once, but she *may* harbor her; and between them they'll write to Tim. All my family affairs undergo his inspection first or last. Yes, women must have a man to consult: they'll write to Tim."

The words awoke a new idea. He stopped abruptly to feel for the little key he had just put in his vest-pocket.

“I wonder that fellow doesn’t lose his head,” said he exultantly. “There’s nothing to prevent my opening his post-office box, and I’ll do it!”

Mr. Braxton did not have his letters brought by penny-post, because the ringing of the door-bell disturbed aunt Rossy. Janet knew this, and would naturally address her letters to his box.

“So here’s my clew,” said Mr. Vail, eying the key with a victorious smile; “and I’ll be my own detective.”

CHAPTER XIV.

LETTER FROM JANET TO MR. BRAXTON.

QUINNEBASSET, April 15.

DEAR TIM,—Here am I in this “zone of calms.” You knew it, and I knew you would know. Your letter came last night, and cousin Brenda would have telegraphed at once ; but something is the matter with the wires, or with the girl who operates the wires. This is why I write.

“Go straight to the desk,” said Brenda, “and throw all the responsibility on Tim. Tell him to inform your parents where you are, or not to inform them, just as he thinks best.”

Don’t, Tim, don’t ! I think I know you and can trust you. To-day is Saturday, and mother will be at home to-night. Tell her you have heard from me, and all is well, but don’t say any more except that I love the ground she walks on. That will satisfy mother, coming from you ; and it’s of no consequence whether Papa Vail is satisfied or not. If he had loved me I would have staid through every thing. Don’t blame me for running away, Tim: I do beg and implore you not to blame me. I was trying to “drink the cup of life as it comes,” I didn’t “stir it up from the bottom;” but somebody else stirred it up; and now it won’t settle, and I’m obliged to drink it, dregs and all.

Oh, if I had known you were coming in the train that night ! But I didn’t know it, and I had to hurry away while father was out of town. I thought there was no other way, but it was the hardest thing I ever did. It was choosing between two evils; for it would have been a great trial to meet Papa Vail, and perfectly dreadful to live with him after I knew the truth. Besides, I had found out that I was making it worse for mother.

Now I'm going to tell you a secret. Mother herself is growing afraid of Papa Vail! She doesn't own it, of course; but I see the tears spring sometimes when he speaks to her in his sharp way. She will suffer far more than I ever did, for she hasn't any temper or any nerves. And I thought I ought to tell you: for there'll be no "stupid" Janet standing by with ether and sponge, and poor little mamma will turn to you, and cling with both hands; and you must be very tender of her indeed, without letting her know why.

Still, I do hope papa will be kinder when I am not there to irritate him. He can control himself if he only tries. Oh, I have come to think there is no quality in the world so valuable as self-control! It is better than genius or knowledge or power.

Well, you'll smile at these moral reflections, and think it would be more to the point if I would tell you what is going to become of me, — what I'm going to do.

Ah, Tim! I don't know. Ask the clouds overhead their plans for the summer. They are drifting, and so am I. I am young and strong, and "plebeian" enough to want to work: but cousin Brenda shakes her head at me, and talks as if the work in the world is all done; at any rate, as if there's none left for me in Quinnebasset. We'll see. If I can only settle down in a corner somewhere, and earn a little money, and not be scolded, that's all I ask. Don't be anxious about me. I'll write you every thing; for though you're not my uncle, — O Tim, that *is* hard! — still, you care what becomes of me: you *won't* let me drop out of your life? Do write and say you care very much. You don't know how I long for some such assurance; for, only think! I've lost all my relatives, every one at a single blow, and my heart is just breaking with emptiness. Tell aunt Rossy every thing; and say, the more she prays for me, the better it will fare with poor wandering Janet. But *don't* tell mother: only give my love to her and the blessed children. Dear old Tim, good-by.

Yours ever,

JANET KEITH.

SECOND LETTER FROM JANET TO MR. BRAXTON.

QUINNEBASSET, April 19.

DEAR TIM, — I suppose you never got a cup of cold water in your hand on a great desert, after a long season of drought, and then dropped the cup; so you can't imagine how I felt last night when Mrs. Whippowill's disgraceful little dog chewed up your letter. I say yours, for who else but you would have written to "Miss Keith"? Mr. Kyte, one of the boarders, brought the family mail as usual, and left it on the hall-table. His mind is always hazy; but he is very sure one letter was for me, and of course that was the very one the dog seized upon. How I had waited and pined for it, though I knew it could not have come any sooner! And then to lose it, every bit and speck and scrap! If I could have seen one word of your writing, it would have been a melancholy satisfaction; but the servant-maid got it all away from the dog, and burned it up. I knew she was stupid, but never dreamed before how stupid; and I knew Fido was a wicked dog, but never before how wicked.

Oh, dear! I can guess some things you said. You promised, first of all, not to tell where I am. Cousin Brenda remarks with an inscrutable look, "How do you know that? He may have informed both your father and your mother: he would do it if he considered it his duty."

But no, you can't have considered it your duty! It isn't your duty to be a traitor! I scorn to doubt you, Tim: if I can't trust *you*, I am undone. But do write again immediately, and repeat every thing you said. Is mother satisfied? Is father searching for me? I am sure he is glad I am gone, but he will never think proper to acknowledge it.

It does not seem any the less dreadful, my running away, Tim; but I am not as unhappy as I expected to be. For one thing, I am in a constant whirl. Life in a boarding-house is new to me, and very amusing. Mr. Kyte says we are the Happy Family; and we seem to revolve around cousin Brenda, who is the life and centre of all. Mrs. Satterlee depends upon

her to make the house attractive, and I think hardly realizes how little time is left her for writing. You know this is just what her physicians would approve, for they all say her brain needs rest; but cousin Brenda mourns over it, and says, "If I rest, I rust."

I have quite fallen in love with Judge Davenport, who is a sort of philanthropist, and has taken ever so many young men into his office from time to time to read law. He called on cousin Brenda last night, and it caused much heart-burning to the absurd little widow who rooms next to us. I wish you could see that widow, the owner of the dog.

But there's another person who interests me more: Judge Davenport's last student, who came on the very day I did, Mr. H. Peabody Phenix. Nobody knows his first name, but I dare say it is Harry; the judge hopes not Harold, as that is an unfortunate name in history. But this young man is thus far pretty lucky, I should think. He is handsome enough certainly, and has a voice like a harp. I suppose he is vain, for he is quite young and has been flattered: still, I feel strangely attracted toward him; for he comes from Poonoosac, has a Scotch complexion, and is — so Mr. Kyte thinks — an adopted son. Only fancy, if he should turn out to be my own brother Harry! You are not to laugh at this, remember; but as soon as I am a little acquainted with him I *will* ask him some questions. There are no Keiths in Poonoosac, I find; and, if there were, his name wouldn't be Keith: he would take his adopted father's name, just as I did; don't you see?

I'm not used to "Miss Keith" yet. I start and hesitate sometimes when I am addressed. Wouldn't you, if you suddenly found yourself *somebody else*? And country people are so curious, they ask *what* Keith it is; and am I "any related to Abby Harrington, she that married a Scotchman?"

Cousin Brenda answers that I have always lived in Brooklyn, and have no relatives this side of New York.

Evening. — An important arrival. Mrs. Bangs was "carted down here" from the Wix neighborhood this evening, and is going to work for Mrs. Satterlee! I fairly danced for joy when I saw her. She delivered your messages. How bright

you both were to guess where I'd gone! But hasn't she quarrelled with father? She doesn't tell, only says he "scolded her up hill and down."

How I did enjoy seeing that skyward nose in the dining-room at tea-time! Even the mourning-collar with bugle trimming looks dear, and so does the big breast-pin "in memory of husband." The incompetent Mary Jane is gone, and there'll be no more letters destroyed by dogs: so write again the moment you receive this.

Affectionately,

JANET KEITH.

CHAPTER XV.

A DETECTIVE.

I HAVE no interest in defending the moral character of Mrs. Whippowill's little dog, who, doubtless, would have destroyed a letter from Mr. Braxton with pleasure if he could have got hold of it; but, as no such letter had ever arrived, Fido's crime lay solely in chewing up some waste paper dropped by Mr. Teague.

Mr. Braxton had heard nothing from Janet, and of course had not written. It never occurred to him that his letter-box could have been tampered with; for, though he had lost the key to it, he had bought a new one immediately.

"No news," he kept saying to aunt Rossy, every time he returned with a haggard face from the post-office. "And, auntie, the wires don't connect at Quinnebasset, and I can't get a message through."

"Don't look so distressed, Timothy," said aunt Rossy, stroking his thick dark locks with her wasted hand: "Janet's safe in the Lord's keeping somewhere."

"Not a doubt of it, auntie; but I'm bound to know where! Brenda can't be in Quinnebasset, or she would have written by this time, if she couldn't despatch."

“She may be in Boston, Timothy.”

“No: for I’ve sent to every person there that I ever heard of; and the invariable answer is, ‘She is now in Quinnebasset.’ That’s where she is supposed to be, but is not.”

“Oh, well! if she’s off visiting she won’t be gone long,” said dear aunt Rossy confidently.

Tim paced the floor, scanned the lever clock, and took out his watch.

“Next thing I shall despatch to Col. Morrison of Poonoosac, and get him to drive up to Quinnebasset, and inquire if a stray young girl has been seen in that village.”

“So I would, Timothy,” assented aunt Rossy, who would not have disputed his wisdom if he had proposed a balloon-flight to Timbuctoo.

“And, auntie, if I can learn nothing from the colonel, I shall post off myself in the night train: what say to that? Are you able to spare me?”

“Any thing, any thing. I can spare you, of course: don’t think twice about me,” returned the dear saint, always serenely unconscious that she lay like a dead weight on the loyal heart of her “boy.”

So Tim sent his twenty-fifth despatch, confirming the telegraph-operator in the suspicion that something was slightly wrong with his brain.

About two hours after Col. Morrison had received the request to go to Quinnebasset, but before he had arrived there, Janet finished her second letter to Tim, vilifying the innocent dog; and flung down her pen, exclaiming, —

“There! I’m going to take this to the office myself;

for, between that flighty Mr. Kyte and that ravenous dog, there may be another mishap."

"What makes you so sure Tim has written? It would be more like him to come himself," suggested Brenda, who sat poring affectionately over a manuscript.

"To come himself?" cried Janet, springing up joyfully, to the imminent peril of her inkstand: "oh, but that is too lovely! Besides, he couldn't afford another journey: you know he has just returned from Boston."

"True; I didn't think of that," said Brenda, planting her little slippered feet on the brass fender, and leaning languidly back in her easy-chair with a tired sigh. "Why, child, where are you going?" as Janet was putting on her hat before the mirror.

"To the office. I told you I was determined to mail this letter myself."

"Oh, yes! but let me go with you."

"No, no, you tired creature! I've been there once, and know the way; and it's considered perfectly safe here for ladies to walk out alone in the 'edge of the dark,' isn't it?"

"Certainly. Turn around, Janet, and let me look at you. Why, how fresh and sound you are! You were rather grim when you first came; and Tim wrote me a pitiful story about you a month ago, — thought you were studying too hard, but I didn't believe it. Girls don't often kill themselves with study: the danger lies in the emotional nature, in the pining and fretting."

Janet seemed struck with the profound wisdom of this remark. "That's it: it *is* the pining and fretting,"

said she, moving thoughtfully toward the window. "I was shrivelling all up: I was dwarfing like a Chinese tree in a flower-pot. Oh! there goes Mr. Phenix. I'll wait till he is out of the way. But isn't he gloriously handsome, though? I do wish you'd find out where he came from, Brenda, and whether he was adopted."

"I have inquired, but nobody seems to know much about him. So don't go to building air-castles; and do, my dear, put on your rubber boots."

"Must I? You're so arbitrary for a little speck of a woman! Hark! what's that?"

"Oh! it's the frogs: bless them, the cheery little minstrels!" cried Brenda, dropping her manuscript, and flying to the window: "it's the first note they've struck this year."

"Would it might be the last!" said Janet, stopping her ears in disgust. "You can't really like that horrible discord, Brenda Harlow? Oh! but I forget: you enjoy every thing of that sort, — toads and caterpillars, and toadstools and milkweed, — every thing that belongs to what you call 'nature.'"

"Well, you'll own yourself that milkweed is beautiful," said Brenda deprecatingly.

"No, I won't, — that clammy thing! Ugh! I wouldn't touch it any more than I'd shake hands with Uriah Heep."

Brenda wondered meekly if there were really some fine instinct lacking in herself, that she could not be properly disgusted with nature's disagreeables.

"Janet, please step into the kitchen as you go out, and tell Mrs. Bangs I would like to see her."

As Janet entered the kitchen through the dining-room, Mr. Ozem Page was just coming in at the back-door with the milk ; and she paused a moment to watch him. She knew that he was a guileless widower, who had bent his mind for some time to the delicate task of learning the views of widows and maidens concerning matrimony ; and it was also rumored, that, getting discouraged, he had been overheard to say, " I've 'most a notion of trying Thurzy Bangs next. I never thought I could stand her nose ; but I've arrived at that point where noses look small to me, seems if ! "

This had been reported to Mrs. Bangs, and Janet was amused now to see her march off to the pantry with her insulted nose in the air.

" Mrs. Bangs," said she, giving her a sly smile through the half-open door, " if you are not too busy, will you go up-stairs to Miss Harlow ? "

" Of course I will : there's nothing to hinder," said Mrs. Bangs, in such a withering tone that Janet fairly ran away to avoid laughing.

" I'd like to see her when she refuses him : it will be very funny."

There had been a slight fall of snow that afternoon, and the trees had taken the white veil again ; while little pools of muddy water winked sleepily in the moonlight, and a few dried grasses by the wayside bowed their wrinkled faces, sighing with regret that ever they were born.

" What a dirty snowball of a world ! " thought Janet, who was not, like Brenda, in " imaginative sympathy " with nature, and saw little beauty in a landscape done in crayons

“It’s all black and white and gray; no color anywhere. Yes, there is color, if we could only see it.” said she, looking reverently upward, — “millions of rainbow-hued stars that make the sky like a garden, only too far away for any one to see but the angels.”

On her right, houses were coming in sight; on her left, muddy meadows, fields, and gardens; and, beyond them all, the graveyard beside the sleeping river. The white and gray stones, which had reminded her in the distance of doves’ wings, stood clearly revealed now in the moonlight, — gravestones and nothing more.

“The people that lie over there can see the colored stars,” thought Janet, smiling to herself.

The first house she passed was Capt. Howe’s; and the curtains were up, giving a full-length picture of the old captain and his wife seated near a double student-lamp. Next, also on the right, three stately dwellings, all with swampy gardens between them and the river. The last one had been the home of Harriet Braxton: the Lorings lived there now. Then, turning a sharp angle to the left, and soon another to the right, she entered the main street, lined with tall ancestral trees stretching a hundred skeleton arms aloft. The dwellings were all old, with a certain air of refinement and taste; and one of them — a long, rambling white house at the corner — had a peculiar interest for Janet, as under its moss-covered roof her own mother had first seen the light. Just outside the yard, at the corner, stood an enormous willow, bearing, high up on its trunk, an old guideboard with the legend, “Poonoosac five miles:” the deceitful finger pointing due south instead of east. Had Abby Harrington seen the guideboard in her little childhood?

and had it been nailed awry as long ago as that? Poor little Abby! She had played under the shade of this old tree, swung on this old gate, — the Abby who afterward grew up, married, died, and left two unhappy children like waifs upon the world. All the Harringtons were dust and daisies now. “A great family for dying off,” as Mrs. Bangs had said, but matched in that respect by the Keiths, it would seem; only that the Keiths were probably buried in Scotland, while all the Harringtons but Abby lay in the Quinnebasset graveyard, and Mrs. Bangs had grimly promised to point out their narrow homes to Janet “as soon as the mud had dried up.”

“Hannah Melissy! Han-nah Me-lis-sy! Susan Vi-o’ly! Susan Vi-o’-ly! Jawn! Jawn, *Jaw-un!* come into the he-ouse!” rang out a high-pitched woman’s voice on the still evening air, — a tender mother’s voice somewhere up the street calling in her little brood to the shelter of her wing. Janet was in the act of depositing her letter in the slit of the post-office door, when she heard the shrill voice, and involuntarily turned her head.

“Not a living being have I seen to-night, unless that’s a man over there,” said she to herself, casting a glance toward the newly completed railroad-bridge which crossed the white river diagonally, and was sometimes used as a footpath by people who preferred it to the toll-bridge just below: as yet no car had ventured upon it. Janet was right: a man was pacing along upon the sleepers with irregular strides, and as she gazed at him her heart almost stopped beating. His face was not discernible in the distance, — the bridge

was perhaps an eighth of a mile from the office; but she could see that he was a tall and singularly graceful man, with a certain foreign air, rendered all the more conspicuous by the long circular cloak which depended from his shoulders. She knew him in a moment, or thought she did, — Mr. Madison Tukey!

Her mind, which had been wool-gathering all the evening, was clear enough now: she understood that of course her father had sent him to Quinnebasset to seek her out; that he had arrived in the Poonoosac stage, and was now strolling about the village preparatory to venturing a call at Mrs. Satterlee's. He was already descending the temporary steps which led from the bridge down the "dump:" he would soon reach the street, and then — Had she time to run home and hide herself? He was a fast walker, but she had the advantage by a great many rods. If she only dared run! But of course that would attract his attention at once. She turned and walked as fast as decorum would allow, not even daring to look back. Before he struck into the street she had gained the corner by the old willow-tree; by the time she turned the corner, he was only at the Liscom Hotel near the post-office, where he fortunately stopped for a minute; and when Janet reached home, white with terror, she heard no footsteps behind her. She had time to enter the house quietly, walk up to cousin Brenda's room, and lock the door.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN HIDING.

ABOUT an hour later Mrs. Bangs dropped in at Mrs. Hackett's on her way home from prayer-meeting.

"Do you know who that dark-complected man was that just came out of your 'us?" asked Mrs. Hackett, pouring some creamy buttermilk into her friend's tin pail, and wiping a drop off her apron with her finger.

"Out of our house? No: I came straight from meeting. How did he look?"

"Well, as much like a cre-owl as any thing: a kind of yellowish skin; handsome as a picture, but not much like our kind o' folks; in a black circular cloak, half-way to his heels."

"You don't say!" responded Mrs. Bangs with a glance of quick alarm at the buttermilk.

"Yes, I met him turning out of your yard; and Delia Liscom says he came to-night in the cars, and is full of questions about that little Keith girl; but he called her something else, Delia couldn't remember what."

"Don't he know enough to call folks by their right names?" asked Mrs. Bangs indifferently, and turned to go.

"Queer; but Col. Morrison of Poonoosac was up

here to-night making inquiries about the same girl, so Delia says. Looks kind o' mysterious. I hope she hasn't run away or any thing; but there'll be remarks made, as sure as you live."

Mrs. Hackett had an unbounded horror of "remarks," though it was understood that she generally originated them herself.

"Why, what's your hurry, Thurzy? You ain't going a step without a bottle of my boiled cider. It's proper good this year, and I've always calculated some of it for Oascaforia: it's so handy to brighten up a mince-pie."

Escaped at last from the good-natured gossip, Mrs. Bangs hastened home, her faithful heart full of forebodings. She found Brenda in her own room, in conclave with Janet, who was seated at her feet, the comb gone from her head, and her heavy bronze-brown hair falling loose over her shoulders, and shining in the firelight.

As Mrs. Bangs walked in unannounced, they both looked up, and Janet exclaimed, "Oh, I'm glad you've come!"

There was a strained look in the girl's face, as if she were exerting all her "manliness" not to cry; and her cheeks had an unnatural flush. Brenda regarded her with a meditative air, not unlike that of a physician at the bedside of a patient.

"Well, he's been here, has he, that Spanish banditti, and caught you, Jinny?"

"Yes: Mr. Madison Tukey has come, but cousin Brenda went down; he hasn't seen me yet."

"Bless the Lord for that!"



"She found Brenda in her own room, in conclave with Janet." — PAGE 122

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ASTOR, LENOX AND
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“Oh! but he’s going to call again: he *will* see me!”

“Bless the Lord all the same, but he *won’t*!”

“There, you dear soul, I knew you’d try to help,” cried Janet with a dry sob, as she seized the widow’s horny hand. But Miss Harlow said wearily, “Mr. Vail sent him, and what can we do? We can’t hide Janet anywhere.”

“Can’t? Why not?” returned Mrs. Bangs with a capable tilt of the nose. “I believe I should ‘risk it to a venter,’ as my grandmother said about eating the strawb’ry her little girl picked a-Sunday.”

Miss Harlow laughed, and coughed, one of her graduated coughs, with more shades of meaning than there are notes in the gamut. “Can you think of a place in this house to hide her?”

“To be sure,” said Mrs. Bangs, as readily as if she had planned it long ago. “There’s an old lumber-room in the L, where Mrs. Tobey used to weave; and I clapped my trunk in there yesterday, and put a button on the door, for I needed some spot to retreat to, you know, and sort o’ meditate at times. Now, Jinny could go there.”

“Do let me,” entreated Janet.

“She could wrap up in her fur cloak; and there’s an old tin foot-stove somewhere about, that the old lady used to use. Ever see one, Jinny? Full of little perforated holes.”

But this plan savored too much of mysteries and complications to meet Brenda’s approval. If it were possible to shut Janet up at all, she suggested keeping her in her own room, and making the most of a slight cold she now had.

“You perceive she’s a little hoarse, Mrs. Bangs?”

Janet coughed by way of illustration.

“Yes, that has the real croupy sound. Well, perhaps you’ve hit on the right thing; and I rather think you have, Brendy,” said Mrs. Bangs, who never did and never would use the prefix “Miss” while she held her right mind.

Thus the matter was finally decided; and, while the boarders next morning were embarrassing Miss Harlow with minute inquiries about Miss Keith’s influenza, Mrs. Bangs was toiling up the back staircase with a smoking breakfast for the prisoner.

“O you dear, good Mrs. Bangs! what a lovely Kioto set, and what superlative cakes! How long do you suppose I’m sentenced for?” said Janet, drawing up to the little table with a smile.

“Can’t say. I ain’t used to banditti; but, as this one has the name of being extra polite, maybe he’ll butterfly round for a day or two and then off. But there’s no knowing,” said the widow, shaking her head with its mournful black sweeping-cap.

“What do you mean? What were you going to say? Is there any thing he can do to *make* me see him?”

“Why, child, your teacup joggles as if you had the shaking palsy, like Henry Meader. I was going to say I don’t know what banditti can do, and what they can’t; but I ain’t scairt yet, — not so but what I’m planning about dinner,” said Mrs. Bangs, changing the subject adroitly as she neared the door. “What say to a huckleb’ry hollow? There’s canned huckleb’ries down suller.”

Miss Harlow's two rooms communicated with each other, and both opened into the upper hall. One was her sleeping-room, the other her "den;" but at ten o'clock in the morning the sleeping-room always became a boudoir, by the mere process of folding up the bed, when lo! a handsome rosewood cabinet stood in its place against the wall, and visitors were welcome to drop in socially. Janet felt very uncomfortable, for what was to prevent Mr. Tukey himself from dropping in? There were keys for both rooms; but they availed little, for it was always, "Open locks, whoever knocks." Miss Harlow kept herself faithfully on guard, but the morning was an intermittent fright for Janet. First came Mrs. Whippowill to inquire gently for her cold, and again Mrs. Whippowill to assure her sadly that "life is uncertain: we are but bubbles and sea-foam; we return, we return no more."

"I know of some sea-foam that returns and returns for evermore," thought Janet. Then came the little Satterlees, who always haunted the room when Janet was in it; much to the annoyance of Miss Harlow, who loved children in the abstract, but never saw Master Teddy turn her furniture "tipside up" without praying for grace. Mrs. Satterlee came in a moment, and then Miss Sanders; but it was not till afternoon that Mr. Tukey announced his approach by ringing the door-bell.

Janet was seated with her back to the heavily curtained window, holding little Katie in her arms, when Teddy rushed up to say there was "a black-haired man in the parlor talking to Miss Harlow, and walking the floor just like this,"—striding fiercely

with his little legs and brandishing his arms, — “and he wants to see you, Miss Janey. You’ll *have* to go down.”

“Teddy, don’t scream so. Do please shut the door,” said Janet growing suddenly severe, and refusing the united requests of the children to sing, —

“But I knew I was happy as I could be,
And the robin sang in a linden-tree.”

“Here you are with your darlings about you,” said Miss Sanders, knocking and walking in. “No, I thank you, I can’t stay a minute; but I’m consumed with curiosity about this elegant foreigner down-stairs, the same one who was here last night. Miss Harlow looks flushed and excited, and I was sorry I happened to stumble upon them in the parlor: she ought to have taken him up to her room. Has she told you who he is? We don’t see a foreigner here once in a cycle.”

“He is a gentleman from New York, and not a foreigner: his name is Tukey,” returned Janet, hiding her hot face against little Katie’s bosom; and Miss Sanders retreated in chagrin, for she had been assuring Mr. Teague she should soon learn from Miss Keith what it all meant.

Janet held her watch in her hand. Nearly six o’clock. It was her hope that Mr. Tukey’s good manners would force him to retire at the ringing of the tea-bell. If not, what would come next? This was already making a great stir, and all Quinnebasset would learn the full particulars before to-morrow morning.

Miss Harlow came up in a few minutes with a raging

headache, saying the enemy had fallen back for the present, but would renew hostilities in the evening.

“Oh, it’s dreadful to see you suffer so for my sake! it makes me feel like a criminal,” said Janet much moved. “What can I do for your head? *Would* it be proper to consult Judge Davenport?”

“Oh! the judge couldn’t help my head,” replied Miss Harlow with an amused smile which sat ill on her haggard face.

“You know what I mean, cousin Brenda: he might tell us what to do with Mr. Tukey. This is wearing you all out.”

“If there is no other way, perhaps I may consult Judge Davenport; but I’ll wait a while, at any rate till I have had a cup of coffee,” said Miss Harlow, trying to speak lightly. “Men are not suggestive or helpful as a rule, you know; and it would be a pity to trouble the judge if he could do nothing for us. Janet, I admire Mr. Tukey: he is a faithful creature,” she added, glancing back with another worn smile as she went down-stairs.

Mrs. Bangs came up bringing the supper-tray, and looking discouraged. “I thought Mr. Tukey would be a hard man to move, with your father at the back of him,” she said.

“Oh, don’t, don’t talk so! You didn’t last night, Mrs. Bangs.”

“Yes; but things look worse the more you look at ’em,” said the widow with cheerful candor. “It’s going to be too much for three lone women like us to oppose Rufus Vail. As husband would say, ‘As well might an army of grass’pers contend against the United-States Army.’ said he.”

Janet smiled faintly at the vision of warlike “grass-pers” armed for a fray. “But, Mrs. Bangs, if I *won’t* see Mr. Tukey? if I persist in not seeing him?”

“Oh, well! but you know you couldn’t hold out against a sheriff and a search-warrant. Why, child, the words slipped out without my thinking! Why, you’ve no idea how white you look: you’ll never look any whiter. *I* don’t know as he’ll get a search-warrant.”

Here the Poonoosac stage was heard lumbering and clattering up to the gate. Mrs. Bangs peeped out of the window in time to see it pause with a tipsy flourish, and hear the driver shout “Whoa!” “Jinny, Jinny, it has stopped here; and as true as you live, your uncle Tim is getting out!”

CHAPTER XVII.

"HIGH TEA."

THE weight lifted from Janet's heart in a moment. "O Tim, Tim, I never was so glad!" cried she, running towards him with both hands extended as Mrs. Bangs ushered him into the room.

"Poor little Janey! and I am glad too," said Mr. Braxton, holding her hands in a close grasp, and gazing tenderly down at the upturned face to learn first of all if it was "well with the child."

"Only think, Tim! I haven't heard one word from you; and I've written three times, not counting one card I scribbled in the cars on a soda-cracker, and threw away because I knew you couldn't read it."

"Oh! you did write?" said Tim, shaking hands again.

"Why, of course I wrote. Didn't you get my letters?"

"Not a blessed one. The first news of you came last night by way of Col. Morrison of Poonoosac."

"How strange! Cousin Brenda told me about Col. Morrison, and we both thought it very singular that you should have despatched to him; but our minds have been pretty full of something else to-day. But stop, have you had any supper? Of course not, and

such a stage-ride! — Mrs. Bangs, do please bring him some supper, and speak to cousin Brenda: does she know he is here?"

"No: I let him in quick and easy without waiting for him to ring, so as not to have any fuss over it. Now, Mr. Braxton, shall I fetch up tea, or would you prefer chocolate?" asked Mrs. Bangs, lingering a moment, spell-bound as usual by the young man's "winning smile."

"Tea, if you please; that is, if I am not permitted to go to the table," replied Mr. Braxton, glancing at Janet's dainty little supper-service as if wondering at the cause of all this exclusiveness. "And how in the world did *you* come here, Mrs. Bangs? You didn't mention it to me: I understood that you were to go to your father's," said he, removing his great-coat, and throwing it over a chair.

"Well, I did calculate to stay in the Wix neighborhood, but it is too lonesome there; and then, again, it seems more natural to be with Jinny and Brendy, so I changed my mind."

"I'm afraid he thinks I'm shifty-minded," said the good woman to herself; "and maybe I am, for I got in such a way of depending on husband that I feel kind of lost now without his advice."

"Now, Tim," said Janet as the door closed, "I know you'll want an explanation, and I'm longing to give it. The truth is, I'm in hiding! Just think! father has sent Mr. Tukey after me; and Brenda and Mrs. Bangs are at their wits' ends to keep me away from him!"

"Mr. Tukey!"

This was altogether new and startling to Tim; but he recovered himself speedily, and drew up his chair to the table, saying, "Oh, well! we will dispose of Mr. Tukey by and by: we won't talk about him yet."

"No, that's right: I have so many questions to ask. Tell me, has mother got home? and what *did* she say?"

"Yes; she came home Saturday, and of course was greatly shocked at first, — as I was, by the way, when I returned on Wednesday! — but she has borne up very well, better than could have been expected."

"Has she? Oh, I thought she would! And she doesn't blame me so very, very much, Tim?"

"She says she does not blame you at all."

"Oh, my dear, sweet mother!" Janet's voice was not altogether firm. "And you, Tim; say you don't blame me either, and I'll die happy."

"I do not blame you either, though I doubt" —

"There, I thought you'd understand: I knew you'd understand," said Janet, leaning back with a sigh of infinite relief.

"Though I doubt the wisdom of your course: I have a great deal to say to you about it pretty soon. And, Janey, you see the way is open for you to go back. I will wait here a day or two, and give you time to think it over."

"Time? I don't want any time!" cried Janet, springing to her feet. "Do you suppose I'll go back to those sharp eyes and that sharp tongue? Never, while I live!"

"Slowly, Janey, slowly. I won't argue with you now: I only wanted to tell you your leaving home is

not necessarily a final thing, for nobody knows of it in Brooklyn, and your father" —

"My father! Perish the name! He's no father of mine!" cried Janet, with a flash of the eye that warned Tim to drop the subject for the present. Evidently the child was more overwrought than he had supposed. Mrs. Bangs, coming in with the tea-tray, produced a diversion.

"I didn't speak to Brendy," said she deprecatingly. "If you'll think a minute, Mr. Braxton, you'll see I couldn't very well, while she is at the supper-table; for there's been quite a rumpus in the house to-day, and folks are getting their curiosity rather excited."

"You acted with great discretion, as might have been expected of you," said Tim, bestowing one of his smiles on the admiring Mrs. Bangs, as she retreated backward into the hall. "That woman has a double share of common-sense," added he, sipping his tea comfortably; "and under all skies her muffins are the same. By the way, have you a pleasant set of boarders?"

"Very. And, Tim, now I think of it, there's one of them I'd like you to see, — a young man."

"Ah?"

"Yes: I have a special reason. It isn't because he is handsome, though he certainly is; and tall and graceful, with the finest hands, and such lovely eyes!"

"Indeed! Any thing more?" said Mr. Braxton, helping himself to butter.

"Brenda says he has 'opaque eyes.' There's always a smile in them; and whether it means any thing, or not, is for you to find out after you get acquainted

with him. He seems to *me* like a boy,” said Janet with a mature smile; “but he talks German pretty well, and I like that.”

“Won’t you show him to me this evening? I can’t wait till morning.”

“Don’t laugh,” said Janet, rolling her napkin, and passing it abstractedly through the handle of the teapot. “He comes from Poonoosac, and I want you to see if his complexion isn’t like mine. *And* — Mr. Kyte thinks he’s an orphan!”

Mr. Braxton, whose mind was not on the search for brothers, looked up in surprise, unable to see any connection between complexions and orphanage, or any cause for Janet’s agitation. But at that moment Miss Harlow’s light step was heard in the passage; and he was still enough of a boy to enjoy hiding behind the door, and springing out upon her as she came in.

“Oh, you miserable, naughty, blessed soul! Where did you come from? And how did you know we needed you so? And who let you in?” cried she, kissing his bearded cheek, and catching her breath in rapture. “Why, you are having high tea here with Janet, and never a syllable did I know about it. Speak! account for yourself.”

“Well, I was let in surreptitiously, and I don’t know what the landlady will do with me when he finds it out.”

“Oh! I can speak for the landlady. Her house is like heaven, ‘the more angels, the more room.’ But, Janet, what miserable hospitality is this! Why, we shall all freeze,” said Brenda, darting toward the dying fire with a pair of tongs.

“Poh! *you* can’t freeze any more than a bottle of ale, little woman,” laughed Tim, taking her up bodily, and extending her upon the lounge; while he replenished the fire with his own hands from the wood-box.

“That’s so like Edward, so exactly like Edward,” said Brenda, sinking contentedly into the cushions. “Now I’m going to lie here where you’ve put me, and not speak a word, for my head aches. Talk about the weather, you and Janet, while I tranquilize my mind; and then tell us what to do with Mr. Tukey.”

“What makes you so sure he’ll come?” asked Janet, snipping yellow paper with the scissors carelessly. Mr. Tukey was a stern fact, but by no means so terrible a fact as he had been half an hour ago. She had dropped him, full weight, on Tim’s broad shoulders, and Tim would manage him: she always believed that he and Brenda together could manage any thing.

“Why, he said he should come, and ‘Miss Vail he should see.’ I tell you, Tim, though I didn’t like to let Janet know it before, I’ve got to the length of my chain; for he threatens a search-warrant and a justice-peace.”

“How gentlemanly! Well, we’ll wait till he brings them: we won’t cross Fox River till we get to it,” replied Tim, watching the paper figures drop one by one into Janet’s lap. “You lie still and finish your headache, Brenda, and leave matters to me.”

The little woman smiled, and took him at his word. When she had said, a little while ago, that “men are not helpful or suggestive, as a rule,” she had not been thinking of Timothy Braxton.

Janet sat by the little table from which the tea-things

had been removed, the light of the study-lamp falling full upon her face. It was not a sad face now. Tim noted that it was eager and expectant, as if she were waiting to see what would come next. He remembered with a smile how she had just been telling him her "life was cut off down to the roots." "I think the roots are in good preservation yet, and can be set out again in Brooklyn to excellent advantage," thought he. "She'll decide to go back with me, and Rufus will treat her better; for he can't help respecting the spirit she has shown."

"Tim, will you please peep over the edge of the curtain, and see who is coming?"

"It's somebody going," returned he, peeping obediently: "a young man. He is brushing a crumb off his sleeve, and now he is settling his hat."

"Well, then, it must be Mr. Phenix. Do you remember I was talking to you, just now, about a fine-looking young man?"

"I hope I do: my memory isn't quite gone. But you didn't tell me he was the fabled bird that rose out of the ashes. — So that's your paragon, is it?" said Tim, in a tone that made Janet feel herself very young indeed, and very shallow. She wished she had been more chary of her praise, for now Tim would criticise the young man unmercifully: that was just his teasing, contrary way.

"Phenix? Phenix? Do you imagine his ancestors boiled soap, or how did he come by the name? I wish I could get a better view of him, Janey; but from this distance I never should imagine he looks like *you*."

"Tim, you didn't know what I meant; for I hadn't

finished talking when cousin Brenda came in. I was going to say I'm not perfectly sure that Mr. Phenix is not my brother."

Tim dropped his bantering tone. "How is that possible? Your brother?"

"Yes: don't you know there were two little orphans; and father — I mean Mr. Vail — adopted one of them, — myself, — and sent the other one to an asylum?"

"Certainly: it was a little boy named Harry, and he died."

"No: Mrs. Bangs says that little boy was taken out of the asylum, and carried to Poonoosac."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes; to Poonoosac, only five miles from here. And now I ask you, Tim, if you were in my place, wouldn't you move heaven and earth to find him?"

"Well, I think I should make inquiries. Did this Mr. Phenix come from an orphan-asylum?"

"That's what I don't know."

"Oh! you don't?"

"No. But he has not always lived in Poonoosac; I know that: and perhaps Phenix isn't his real name, any more than Vail is mine. He may bear the name of his adopted father, as I did, don't you see?"

"So he was adopted, was he?" said Tim with awakening interest.

"Well, I don't know about that: I'm going to find out," stammered Janet, feeling rather foolish.

Tim whistled, but refrained from comment.

"If he had been dark I shouldn't have dreamed of the thing! but that complexion, Tim, why, it's Scotch for all the world! It's just the complexion the Scotch

always have," declared Janet confidently, resolved to stand by her colors, whether she had any ground to stand on or not.

Tim had been from time to time peeping out of the window behind Janet's chair, while she talked and Brenda slept; and now in the distance he thought he discerned the sweep of Mr. Tukey's cloak.

"I believe I'll run out a minute," said he, looking for his hat. "Perhaps I may meet that brother of yours — or somebody else."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DECISION.

“’TIS the month before the month of May, and the spring comes slowly up this way,” remarked Mr. Braxton, re-entering the room an hour later with a very cheerful mien.

“Now tell us where you’ve been!” exclaimed Brenda, seizing upon him: “explain yourself, sir.”

“Glad to see you’ve rallied your forces, cousin Brenda. Well, I’ve been on an exploring expedition through three latitudes: I found a Sahara in your doorway, a California wet season in the street, and Alpine snows on the hill.”

“He’s been to Jubilee Hill!” cried Brenda. “Now tell us, did you meet the enemy on the way?”

“Yes,” replied Tim, seating himself between the two ladies before the fire, “I met Mr. Tukey. He didn’t seem particularly glad to see me, but I didn’t let that interfere with my pleasure in seeing him. I told him we seemed to be on the same errand, asked him how he was succeeding, and offered him all the assistance in my power.”

“How dared you?” said Janet.

“Well, I saw he was getting discouraged. He was obliged to confess that he hadn’t yet had an interview

with Miss Vail ; that the little authoress had ‘ shut his nose in the door,’ whatever that may mean.”

“ Bravo for the little authoress ! ” said Janet, patting Brenda’s shoulder ; “ but I wonder he was willing to tell of that.”

“ On the contrary, he seemed glad to relieve his mind. He asked me if I knew what it meant, what was the real cause of Miss Janet’s running away ? Was it as Miss Harlow represented ? Had she borne all she could from her father, and was it useless to urge her to go back ?

“ ‘ I want to do my duty,’ said Mr. Tukey, heaving a sigh ; ‘ but it is a hard thing for me to be in the position of confidential clerk to Rufus Vail. *He* says his daughter was frightened out of her senses when she found she was an adopted child : the news was sprung upon her too suddenly ; and, as she expected to be cut off with a shilling, she concluded to leave. That’s *his* story : *he* thinks she only needs a little coaxing to bring her back. He charged me to see her, and tell her he had invested a large sum of money in her name, — I wasn’t to say how much, — and if she goes back she will have it, every cent of it ; otherwise, not.’ ”

“ Oh, yes ! I know all that : he explained it to cousin Brenda. As if I should be influenced by such a flimsy thing as money ! It’s positively humiliating,” said Janet with supreme scorn.

“ Well, I told Mr. Tukey I thought you belonged to just the sort of unpractical, lofty-minded, disdainful young ladies, who won’t listen to any mundane talk about dollars and cents.”

“ There, I’m glad you said that, Tim. I shouldn’t

care if father was 'emperor of Arracan, owner of the white elephant and the two earrings: ' all his gold wouldn't tempt me one bit."

"I think Mr. Tukey has a glimmering perception of that fact, Janey; but he has been very anxious to see you in order to do his duty and satisfy your father. If you had only gone and talked with him frankly, you would have found him very reasonable; but, as it is, he has been considerably irritated."

"Why, Tim, he has seemed very obstinate and almost violent. Perhaps I flew out at him in the wrong way. I do lack coolness, I confess," said Brenda with a penitential cough.

"Oh! there's no harm done, and all the talk about sheriff and search-warrant was out of compliment to you for your 'bristling up so,' as Mr. Tukey elegantly expresses it: he wasn't in earnest for a moment."

"I wish men would deal with women sensibly, and not treat them like children and idiots," said Brenda, recalling with shame the attitude of "bristling" defiance she had assumed toward the harmless clerk.

Tim rubbed his hands in silent enjoyment of her humility.

"Well, Janey, you see Mr. Tukey never designed to carry you off; and now if you will only consent to see him, and send your compliments to your father, it will be a great relief to his mind."

"See him? Oh, yes, indeed! if that's all."

"That's right. I told him I thought you would; and he'll call here in about five minutes, as he goes by with Mr. Liscom in a mud-wagon to Poonoosac, to take the night-train for New York."

“Oh! is he really going?” cried Brenda, clapping her hands, while Janet said in an awe-stricken whisper, —

“Why, Tim, it’s too good to be true!”

“Tell him you will not go back with *him* on any terms: if you go at all, it will be with me.”

“I shall make it plainer than that. I shall send my good-bys to papa, — my final good-bys with the politest speech I can make.”

How bright the room looked that had seemed all day so prison-like to Janet! The yellow birch-wood fire shot up a flame of triumph; Brenda broke into a light-hearted laugh; the canary next door began to sing. And at the same moment the door-bell rang: *was* it the same door-bell that had startled the house like an alarum all day?

“He is a perfect gentleman! He shook hands, and said he knew just how to pity me, and he was glad I had the pluck to hold out,” said Janet, coming back from her interview with the confidential clerk. “Yes, it’s all over now. Mr. Tukey has done his best, and goes away easy because the blame will all fall upon me and not upon him. How can I ever thank you, Tim, you and Brenda, for what you’ve done for me? You’re the best friends a girl ever had! I’m so happy! and all that troubles me now is that you don’t either of you belong to me,” added she wistfully, a twinge of loneliness seizing her in the very midst of her joy.

“Yes, we do belong to you, both of us. What if we are not of the same flesh? aren’t we of the same spirit?” said Brenda with an affectionate kiss.

Tim took some waste-paper out of his pocket, and

began to scribble ; a confirmed habit of his when embarrassed or disturbed, the act seeming to have a sedative effect on his mind.

“Don’t you know how much I’ve always said about being the odd one, Tim, and not looking like the rest of the family? But it never once occurred to me that I was really an *alien*.”

Mr. Braxton said nothing. He was never much given to sentiment, and this was one of the occasions when he could not trust himself to speak.

“I can guess what he wants to say, and I’ll interpret for him,” said Brenda. “He always considered himself your uncle, till *you* knew to the contrary ; and now, though the tie of relationship is gone, he feels it tugging at his heart-strings just the same.”

There was no response ; but she went on, —

“Do you remember, Janet, what Sophy Lane said about her arm that was cut off fifteen years ago? She feels the nerves of that arm yet, even to the tips of the fingers, all alive and quivering. That’s the way Tim and I both feel, dear ; for things you’ve once known *can’t* go out of your life, even when they are dead.”

Janet reached forth, and clasped Tim’s hand and Brenda’s in both her own.

“I know it : I never can give up my hold of you. But it isn’t like Sophy Lane’s arm, when you think of it : for that was really hers once, and you never were mine ; the relationship was only grafted on. You don’t seem, either of you, to understand, — quite. It’s the family tie that I want : I’m not used to missing it.” Here her voice faltered. “You don’t seem to think, — why, Brenda. why, Tim, I’ve lost every thing at one blow, — aunts and uncles and cousins and all.”

Brenda coughed, at a loss what to say; for Janet's was not an ordinary form of bereavement certainly, and did not admit of the usual forms of condolence. But Tim, regaining his speech, said, —

“ You see now, don't you, why I wasn't much of an uncle? You know I never aspired to any such honor, and wouldn't accept the title. So why can't we drop that old-fashioned idea right here, and be done with it? ”

How obtuse of Mr. Braxton! But he had always betrayed a peculiar sensitiveness regarding uncleship, — a sensitiveness which increased, perhaps, with the tiny bald spot that was growing on the crown of his head.

“ Oh, don't! ” entreated Janet: “ I haven't the least desire to call you any thing but ‘ Tim, ’ only I want to feel that you *are* something more. You *must* be something more to me: I need it so! ”

“ So I will, — your friend and humble servant now and forever, ” replied he earnestly, laying his hand on her head, and holding it there a moment in just aunt Rossy's way. Was it with an unspoken blessing? So it seemed to Janet, and she was soothed by the touch.

“ I will be good, ” thought she, “ and keep my little heartaches to myself. It isn't to be expected that Tim and Brenda can understand, and I don't want them to consider me high-flown. ”

But Brenda had been rather surprised by Tim's speech, and still more by his uncalled-for solemnity; and sat regarding the young man with some curiosity, as if studying a new and interesting phase in his character.

“ So it seems, ” said she presently, “ that we are

safely forded over Fox River at last, thanks to you, Tim ; and now we can afford to drop personal subjects, and have a nice little chat about — about the weather. You're like me : *you* like these dull spring days, when the earth lies in a waking dream ; and the trees shiver, ' waiting to be clothed upon ; ' and the old brown grass feels the first stirring of hope at its roots? ”

“ Yes ; there's an endless charm in the processes of Nature,” replied Mr. Braxton, in an absent tone, as if “ pre-occupied of his own soul ; ” but Brenda went on enthusiastically, —

“ Janet talks of the dismal winds and rains and snows ; but aren't the dismal winds drying up the pools? Isn't the late snow enriching the ground, and answering the prayers of a myriad hidden rootlets, and giving new life to all the little germs that ask in faith? Things are not what they seem, Tim : that's the lesson I learn anew every spring.”

“ Certainly : so do I,” he returned ; but I doubt if he had heard a word. “ By the way, Janey, I met that Mr. Phenix ; and he hasn't a drop of Scotch blood in his veins, for I looked him through and through.”

The next evening found the three friends seated again in Miss Harlow's room ; Mr. Braxton giving the fire from time to time a gentle nudge, which it answered with tongues of gaudy flame. He had been waiting all day for some further expression from Janet in regard to going back with him to Brooklyn : he could not accept her refusal as a finality.

“ Now,” said Brenda, in her turn attacking the glowing maple with the tongs, “ the next thing is to dispose of this child. What shall be done with her? ”

“Ask her first what she wants to do with herself. She has been thinking it over all day,” replied Tim, trying to look indifferent.

“Why, no, indeed: I haven’t thought it over at all! Why should I, when I knew my mind from the first minute? I’ll never go back, even with you, Tim, unless I am forced.”

Mr. Braxton looked at her set face, pushed back his chair, arose, crossed the room, and returned, before he spoke again.

“Never fear,” said he in a subdued tone: “nobody will force you to go back while I have the power to prevent it. Only remember, Janey, this is a cold, hard world: you don’t know it, but remember I tell you so.”

“Now, what does everybody mean by that? Didn’t our Father make the world, and isn’t it wrong to say his work is not good?” said Janet, raising her young eyes to his full of ignorant trust.

What a child she was still! how little she knew!

“I don’t mean to slander the world, Janey. There are soft spots in it, warm little nests called homes” —

“But some of the nests are lined with gold, and that makes them very hard,” interrupted Janet, drawing a silk thread out of the fringe of her sleeve and untwisting it, — “too hard for me: I’d rather have no home at all.”

Tim looked at the young creature reared in luxury, thought of his own struggles in life, and shut his teeth together hard.

“I have plans; you needn’t suppose I haven’t been thinking: but Brenda won’t listen to a word. Now, *I* want to give music-lessons.”

“There are two teachers of the piano here already,” said Brenda, looking at Tim; who said, “Then that’s settled, for teachers are like office-holders, ‘few die, and none resign.’”

“But I mean vocal music,” faltered Janet; “and Brenda knows it, but that’s the way she has done ever since I came. She is determined to throw cold water on all my plans.”

“Perhaps she is only waiting to see if you are in dead earnest, and then she means to help you,” said Tim, pacing the floor again, stung by the thought that he himself could not help. As a stranger in town he had no influence, and, worse than that, he had no money. Why is it that your great-hearted people are so often the impecunious ones?

“Brenda knows everybody in Quinnebasset; and if your mind is really set on this thing, Janey, I’m sure she can bring it about.”

“I know it: ‘she could an if she would,’ for the people here just worship her.”

“Oh, folly!” said the little lady, blushing. “I’m popular just now because I removed a kernel of corn from a child’s windpipe last winter, when the doctor was not to be had. You know how it is in these little villages, Tim: ‘every good and every bad deed counts nine times over,’ if it’s done at Quinnebasset, just as if it were at Mecca. But all the influence I have I’ll gladly use for Janet: she shall stay here if she chooses, and we will see what can be done with her.”

It was the first time Brenda had granted the permission, and Janet’s heart went up with a bound.

CHAPTER XIX.

QUINNEBASSET PEOPLE.

“**I** CAN’T send the dear child away now, and I *am* thankful,” said Miss Harlow to herself that night, as she rose softly to close the blinds, and shut out the moon which was shining full on Janet’s pillow, whitening her fair face, and turning her tawny hair to burnished gold.

“How beautiful she is in her sleep! You are mine now, you dear one,” touching her lips to the lovely hair that strayed over the pillow, and pausing a moment to scan the features at rest.

“Yes, Tim is right: it is a true and noble face, without a single weak line. Janet Vail, you are worth your weight in diamond-dust; but, considering how little you know of this wicked world, I feel as if I’d adopted a baby. At my time of life too!” sighed Brenda with a humorous smile as she crept back into bed. Perhaps she was almost afraid of finding too much enjoyment in her new undertaking; for she was a bit of a Puritan at heart, though nobody knew it, and inclined to distrust a pleasure unless it involved a sacrifice. Ever since the death of her brother, she had given herself very much to the care of the sick and suffering; and as Janet was not exactly a sufferer, but

an affectionate young girl most congenial to her tastes, it did really seem that she was rather out of Brenda's "line."

"Besides, I'm incompetent to manage such a headstrong child; but, for that matter, so is Harriet Vail. I *can't* be more unfit than poor Harriet," said Miss Harlow with a smile; and, consoled by this just reflection, she soon dropped off to sleep.

Mr. Braxton left next morning. "Really," said Mr. Page, who drove him down to Poonoosac, after an early breakfast, to take the cars, "you don't say that little Keith girl is going to cast in her lot with us Quinnebasset folks? Any relation to you? She ain't? Oh, well, maybe she will be some time! So *that's* it, is it? Mrs. Hackett said she *guessed* that was it," added he, entirely unconscious of giving offence. Touched by his apparent bashfulness, Mr. Braxton had been trying to lead him into conversation, and with this result. Ozem was a delusive being: slow to start, but, when he once began to talk, going on and on like a music-box till the question now arose, Would he ever stop?

"Glad for you if *that's* it. Man needs a companion here below, and she's a pretty-spoken little girl. Comes of a likely family too: I knew her mother well. The Harringtons used to live in the big white house at the corner; and Abby's husband was a Scotchman, and kept school. My wife knew him, — that's Dorkis, — used to borrow his books. Dorkis had a master head-piece. Is Brendy Harlow going to sort of adopt the girl? Well, Brendy'll be a good hand. No family ties, and no opinion of matrimony, Brendy hain't," said

the widower, betraying by his unconscious bitterness of tone that he had gained his information from headquarters.

“Yes, that’s the breakfast-bell that’s ringing, — the court-house bell; and we’re ahead of time, you see: though there’s no knowing *what* time it is when Henry Meader rings the bell, for he rings it to suit his own pleasure and convenience. But we don’t find any fault, for he was wounded in the late war, not to speak of shaking palsy: that’s why he can’t ring very loud and stidly. But Quinnebasset is famous for putting up with poor sticks.

“No, I *wasn’t* born in Quinnebasset. I was born in Litchfield, which event took place in eighteen-twenty; and I shall be sixty years old if I live till the latter part of next month. Left without a companion, in the bleak world alone. My wife died of a complication of diseases, ’twill be two years come November. Might have been alive now if she hadn’t lost off one of her rubbers! Well, I’ll explain: she was pickin’ wintergreen in the woods, and, losing off the rubber, wet her foot, and never got over it. She was a remarkable woman, Dorkis was; had a great headpiece. I never shall have her loss made up to me, never. I’ve got a little girl keeping house for me now, niece to my first wife, — I mean *late* wife, — that’s Dorkis; a good little girl, sixteen years old; don’t know how to plan and contrive. It’s no way to live, and I’ve a’most made up my mind, — seems if” —

Here the music-box, coming to a catch in its last tune, suddenly ceased; and Mr. Braxton was left to conjecture what a widower in Mr. Page’s circumstances

“would be likely to a’most make up his mind” to do. Mrs. Bangs was left that very evening to the same conjecture. Mr. Page came as usual with the milk, glanced at the stove-boiler, and for the first time addressed to the large-nosed widow his customary formula about “nobody to keep house for him but a little girl, and he’d a’most made up his mind, — seems if” —

Thurzy had expected this, and was frigid in a moment.

“Ozem,” said she, retreating to the pantry with the milk, “you ought to hire a good housekeeper: you’ve got money enough; and why don’t you take it, and make yourself comfortable in your old age?”

The bereaved gentleman winced.

“A housekeeper? Why, Thurzy, what do you mean? Don’t you think it’s any use for me to try to find a second partner?”

Thurzy pretended to hunt for the mixing-spoon, but there was a hard look in her eye; for though a Christian she was human, and her nose had always been a tender feature. “Oh, yes, Ozem! you’d better not give up trying till you’ve tried Miss O’Neil. I guess you two would suit!” And, leaving this stinging sarcasm to rankle in his mild breast, she returned to the pantry to mix her bread.

Miss O’Neil, indeed! This was a crowning insult. He stalked out of the gate in a towering rage.

“I never made any offer to Thurzy Bangs, that’s one thing sure; and then to have her heave Miss O’Neil in my face! Why, Miss O’Neil ain’t considered bright! ’Pears to me, though, she’s full as bright

as Thurzy Bangs, and a sight better-looking ; ” shaking his head at the image of the widow as it arose before his mental vision, with a nose that no longer “ looked small to him,” but positively huge.

Mrs. Bangs finished her bread, and set it on the stove-boiler to rise, then went up to relate her experience with Ozem to “ Brendy ” and Janet.

Janet was beginning to feel an interest in village people and affairs. She was now an adopted citizen, and, before another Sunday, had received calls from nearly all her mother’s old friends. Rev. Mr. Hinsdale told her that Abby Harrington had been a beloved member of his church, and he had officiated at her wedding. Mrs. Selden, Mrs. Loring, Mrs. Willard, Miss Willard the poetess, and many other charming ladies, received her with open arms ; and Miss O’Neil was behind no one in overtures of good-will, assuring her she was “ quite a decent-looking girl, after all, though it had got round town that she was very homely ! ” The witless old lady pronounced her “ the very image of her mother ; ” adding, however, that she was entirely unlike her in face, figure, size, and general appearance !

Dear Aunt Tilura Wix happened down from the Wix neighborhood, and told Janet that she remembered stoning raisins for Abby Harrington’s wedding-cake, and “ Abby was most an excellent girl.” These kind allusions were precious to Janet ; and her heart warmed toward the good, friendly people, some of whom were refined and cultured enough to grace the best society. But of course she never heard of sundry sharp remarks, made by Delia Liscom and others of

her set, as to the rashness of her "running away and leaving a handsome property." — "Needn't tell me it was all her father's actions: there must have been blame on both sides. She looks as if she had a temper of her own!" the latter suspicion being grounded on the shade of red in her hair.

Janet attended divine service for the first time with much interest. The church was a fawn-colored wooden building, with brown blinds, and had withdrawn from the world into a sacred stillness behind the trees. The double doors swung back on their solemn hinges; and the villagers were ascending the wooden steps, and entering the vestibule with an air of sober respectability and becoming reverence. Meanwhile the bell rang out with a faint, uncertain, tremulous sound, suggestive of shaking palsy. Poor Henry Meader, in his office of sexton, was just what Mr. Page had represented him to Mr. Braxton, — "a poor stick."

Miss Harlow escorted Janet and Mrs. Bangs into her own wing-pew on the left of the pulpit, commanding a view of the whole congregation, with a side-glance at the well-cut features of the Rev. Mr. Hinsdale.

Janet felt herself, as she really was, the centre of all eyes, and, in her embarrassment, stared resolutely at the opening in the ceiling over the clergyman's head, — a sort of trap-door, used as a ventilator, and supposed also to shed a little light on the sermon. On each side the pulpit were tablets; and she read and re-read, "The Lord is in his holy temple," without being able to fix her thoughts on the words. Then she heard Ozem Page's boots creaking up the aisle, and saw him seat himself, in an apologetic way, just before

Mrs. Bangs ; while his eyes roved about as guilelessly as the blue eyes of a young kitten intent on chasing a ball of yarn. Opposite him, in another wing-pew, sat his peer in intellect, Miss Norah O'Neil, who had crushed her finger in the pew-door, and was taking an unusually gloomy view of life. She felt that we are all miserable sinners ; though she was sure Henry Meader's guilt loomed just now a little above the average, because he had neglected to dust the table in front of the pulpit. Ozem looked at her, and wondered if she were frowning at *him*.

“Thurzy Bangs is disposed to slur at her ; but Miss O'Neil has always used *me* well, and that's more than I can say for some of the women in this town !” thought he : for her crossness was really respectful in comparison with the ridicule he had lately endured from many quarters ; and, as he remembered she had never laughed at him, his battered heart thrilled with gratitude.

Janet gained courage to look about her. In one of the middle body-pews sat Mrs. Whippowill, peering out with one eye from the edge of her mourning-veil ; before her the bronzed, benevolent judge, and Mrs. Satterlee with her lovely children ; not far off, the dark, handsome poetess, Miss Willard, looking fixedly at the side-lamps, without being aware that her brother's little daughter had seized her hand and was slyly unbuttoning her glove. The other celebrity, the coarse-featured, thick-set Miss Exene Giddings, looked equally abstracted, as if the house might take fire and she would not know it. Yet Janet was sure the poetic faculty does not necessarily deaden one's senses to the outer world ; for who was more alert than the acknowledged genius, Brenda Harlow ?

Mr. Kyte sat, as usual, near the door, ready to usher in any possible stranger, or otherwise supply the place of the inefficient sexton. Always active, always chivalrous, the good soul served the public, and was laughed at for his pains. But Janet's interest was centred chiefly in one of the front pews, occupied by Mr. Teague and Mr. Phenix; for these young men, by force of circumstances, were thrown much together, though no two people could have had less in common. She found herself continually glancing toward Mr. Phenix, and as often meeting his eye; when, as it seemed to her, they both turned away their heads in a mutual agony of embarrassment. But this was a mistake: it was only Janet who felt embarrassed. Mr. Phenix, whose mind was not dwelling upon orphan brothers, could not of course suspect that she was making him the subject of a domestic romance: he merely thought she seemed much impressed by his appearance, and this was something he had expected and was perfectly prepared for.

The choir faced the pulpit. It was almost as densely packed as the famous choir of blackbirds baked in a pie; and, when the birds began to sing, two of the voices jangled, and Janet's ears were in torment. Then she remembered that her own mother had sung soprano in that very place. She wondered how her voice had sounded, and how her face had looked with the violet and crimson rays of light falling on it from the stained-glass windows. Or was stained glass a fashion strange to country churches in those days? Janet's thoughts dwelt often upon this sorrowful young mother, who had long ago gone down into silence. It seemed

almost like disloyalty to sweet Mrs. Vail, but she could not help wondering if there is not a peculiar bond between an own mother and her daughter like no other tie upon earth.

And now the sermon began. Janet had felt strongly attracted toward Rev. Mr. Hinsdale from the first; partly for his own sake, and partly because he seemed a connecting link between herself and the Abby Harrington who had been "one of his flock." Who knew but in the next world he would be the very one to say with a smile, "Mother, behold your daughter!" that is, if Janet should ever be found worthy of that land of light, where both father and mother awaited their child.

The text appealed at once to the young girl's experience: "The place is too strait for me. Give place to me, that I may dwell."

"Why, cousin Brenda," said she, as they were picking their homeward way through the mud, "I felt just like that when I ran away! The place *was* too strait for me; but here it is wide and free and still. I do believe I can *dwell* in Quinnebasset!"

CHAPTER XX.

MR. PAGE'S COURTSHIP.

IT was useless for Miss Harlow to remonstrate with Janet, who would go on fancying Mr. Phenix to be her brother until he had proved to the contrary. And, as she was not willing to "bother him with impertinent questions," it might be some time before the truth would be known: she "wanted it to come naturally," she said.

The first definite thing she learned about him was on May Day, and then by mere chance. He and Mr. Teague, with herself and Miss Harlow, had gone Maying in a field a little way beyond Jubilee Hill. The flowers of the trailing arbutus were pale and few that year: their winter coverlet had been too early removed, though there was still snow in the hollows; and the young people divided their attention between gathering Mayflowers, and throwing snowballs.

"Just the climate for polar bears," said Mr. Phenix, drawing his gloves over his red fingers. "I'm thankful I was born in a sunnier region, and I wish I had staid there."

"And where was that?" ventured Janet.

"California."

The word thrilled along her nerves like a slight elec-

tric shock; yet had she not known it was the very word he would speak?

“I’d like to shake hands with you, Mr. Phenix. I, too, was born in California!”

A few mornings after this, breakfast was late; and the boarders waited about, talking in groups. Miss Harlow and Janet were on the front door-stone; and Janet was looking in through the open window at Mr. Phenix, who had plucked a geranium-blossom from a pot on the flower-stand, and was marching off with it in his button-hole.

“Just see how he admires himself!” said she, with good-natured superiority, thinking, perhaps, she should tell him some day how she had laughed at him, some day after she was blessedly certain of being his sister.

What if he did speak last night of his parents and sisters at Poonoosac, as if they quite belonged to him? Just so had she spoken of all the Vail family, not one month ago, as belonging to herself!

One thing she knew: he was a native of California; and no doubt, if she only had the courage to question him further, she should find that he had, like herself, a peculiar history, — that he had not known his real name all this while, but had been waiting for her to reveal it.

Absurd, you say; but the poor child had been bereft so suddenly of all ties of kindred, that it was only natural she should fling out eager tendrils toward the first object that offered the least hope of support.

“I know what you are thinking of, but it’s all folly,” said Brenda, taking her by the shoulders, and whirling her away from the window. “He is no more your

brother than he is mine : but he is too handsome and fascinating by far, and I ought not to have taken him into chocolate-corner ; in fact, I've a mind to send him out again."

"Don't, oh, please don't ! I want him where I can look at him," said Janet earnestly.

And then the bell rang, and they went in to breakfast ; but Brenda felt a tardy twinge of conscience, and gazed sternly at Mr. Phenix in return for his beaming "good-morning." What right had he to smile on her and Janet, as if they two were the only beings in the world to him, and without them life would be a dreary void ? She liked Mr. Teague much better, with his business bow which seemed to say ladies were of small consequence to a man who had lost twenty minutes by a late breakfast.

Janet held a different opinion.

"What fine manners Mr. Phenix has ! Papa did a foolish thing when he sent him away, and adopted me," thought she, as the young Apollo asked her for the sugar with an insinuating grace that made the words seem like a personal compliment.

"I never knew till last night, Miss Keith, that we have a prima donna in the house ; and I shouldn't have known it then if I hadn't overheard you singing as I came into the yard. How can you be so cruel as not to sing for us in the parlor ? I assure you I stood at the gate fairly entranced."

Mr. Teague had been with him, and he had stood also entranced ; but it would not have occurred to him to mention it.

"Ah ! but you *can* sing, Miss Keith," said Miss

Sanders, nodding her classic head. "I know good music, and I'm sure you've had training."

As Miss Sanders was a Boston girl, and had been at Wellesley, this was final.

"Ever study elocution?" asked Mr. Teague, looking up sharply from his plate.

Janet modestly admitted that she had, "a little."

"Of course," commented Miss Sanders. "I knew that by the way she delivers her voice in speaking. I wish, Mr. Teague, we could have elocution in our school."

She was always "wishing" and suggesting, till Mr. Teague felt like retorting sometimes, "Pray, whose school is it, — yours, or mine?" but he only said now, buttering his toast, "I'd like it, too, if it would work."

"And, pray, why wouldn't it work?" said Miss Sanders warmly, as if he were putting her down. "We have French and German, and the piano: why not elocution? I'd give all I know of playing if I could read better."

"Sensible," said the judge, who hated a piano, and indeed any musical instrument but a hand-organ, and only tolerated that for the sake of the monkey.

"Oh, yes! I agree with you, judge: I so love good reading!" cried Mrs. Whippowill.

"So do I," said Mr. Teague, folding up his napkin; "only I've seen enough of these long-haired professors of elocution, and that's all the sort that would ever come to a little place like this."

Janet's face had been flushing more and more; but Miss Harlow remarked carelessly, —

"Oh! as to that, one can't tell without trying, Mr.

Teague. I know of more than one accomplished young lady who might consent to teach in your school if you wish it."

"I do wish it," replied he with unexpected promptness: "name the young lady."

"What a boy you are for action! Let me put on my thinking-cap first," said Miss Harlow, laughing.

"If she's pretty I'd like to go to her myself," said the gallant Mr. Kyte.

"And I," echoed the judge.

"Why couldn't we all go?" suggested Mrs. Whippowill sweetly.

The conversation seemed promising.

"Janet," said Miss Harlow that evening, "suppose you go to Miss O'Neil's with this phial of medicine; and I'll have Mr. Teague up in my room, and talk business."

"O you dear Brenda, you're so good! I think anybody that can talk business must have a strong mind; for the very thought of it appalls me, especially with such an up-and-down person as Mr. Teague," said Janet, running off in a flutter.

Miss O'Neil seemed very glad to see her. She had just returned from a missionary tea-party, and was still arrayed in her black cashmere dress, blackest false front, and nicest clocked mitts.

"She must have been a beauty in her day," thought Janet; and in truth that was precisely what the amiable spinster had been thinking, herself.

"Seventeen offers, and not married yet!" she had sighed, as she looked in the mirror on the opposite wall. It must be confessed, however, that the number

of her past offers varied according to the tone of her spirits. When she was in full dress, and free from neuralgia, it rose as high as thirty, but in her sadder moments sank as low as ten sometimes, or even five.

"I'm so glad to see you," said she cordially; and flashed out with brilliant recollections of Janet's aunt on the mother's side, who turned out of course to be the aunt of somebody else. This mistake had hardly been rectified when there was a loud peal of the lion's-head knocker, and Ozem Page appeared at the door. His motives were purely benevolent: he had come to bring some early asparagus, thinking the while, —

"Poor Miss O'Neil! they are always picking upon her, same as they are upon me. Guess I better take her a little something to eat."

Ozem was a kindly soul, and usually expressed his sympathy in vegetables. Many were the choice turnips and watermelons he had carried to his neighbors when they were in affliction, and now on this moonlit night he thought of poor Miss O'Neil naturally suggested asparagus.

"Thank you kindly, Mr. Page. Won't you walk in? I should admire to have you."

Now, Mr. Page was not used to being admired, indeed, quite the contrary; and for the very novelty of the thing he walked in. This was as much of a surprise to himself as to Miss O'Neil; for, often as he had come to the door with friendly offerings, he had never called since the death of his wife.

"Why, the old lady looks a good ten years younger than I thought she did," mused he, seating himself as he bowed to Janet.

“Well,” said Miss O’Neil with sober politeness, “you’ve been called to mourn.”

Then recollecting that his mourning must be pretty well over by this time, she added hurriedly, —

“Got your wood in yet?”

“Yes, ma’am, I have.”

Janet queried whether he referred to the wood or the “call to mourn.”

There was a pause. Miss O’Neil had just observed that he was dressed in his Sunday’s best, and the fact was significant and embarrassing. She gazed appealingly at the photograph of the Rev. Mr. Hinsdale which hung upon the wall; but Mr. Page sat unconscious of the tumult he had raised, and drew mental comparisons between the nose of Miss O’Neil and that of Mrs. Bangs. His late wife had been a handsome woman, and Ozem was not indifferent to feminine beauty.

“Awful about Heber Green, wasn’t it though?” said he, folding and unfolding his arms, — his habit when he had news to tell.

“What about him?”

“Why, hain’t you heard? Got killed half an hour ago, on the railroad-track.”

Miss O’Neil threw up both mitted hands. “Why, it can’t be possible! He went by here this morning with his tin pail, just as he always does.”

“Yes, I know; but you see, they were loading up with gravel, and the engine backed quick, and threw him under the wheel. He met with a similar accident last spring in pretty much the same way.”

Janet might have smiled at this speech if her horror had allowed her to smile; but Miss O’Neil threw up her hands again, exclaiming, —

"This comes of building that railroad! They never built one at Machias, and you never heard *there* of folks getting killed on the track! And he left a family too! *What* a piece of carelessness!"

"It is dreadful! I hope they are not poor," said Janet.

"Poor? You never heard yet of a Green that wasn't poor!" said Miss O'Neil severely; and then, "dropping into" religion, she bethought her of her favorite text, "Do good in thy good pleasure into Zion; build thou the walls of Jerusalem."

Ozem pondered. Did she refer to the building of the railroad? Not likely. Then perhaps to the doctrine of election.

"Well, ma'am, I ain't so clear on those subjects as I'd ought to be," said he, folding his arms apologetically: "but I agree with you as far as this; we can't any of us die till our time comes. I felt that in regard to Dorkis."

Miss O'Neil, who had been shocked out of her embarrassment by the fearful news, felt a relapse now to first symptoms. It "meant something" when a widower began to talk of his first wife.

"Yes, Mrs. Page had so many sicknesses, and always got over them, you must have felt discouraged," said she, intending to be sympathetic. Here Janet, finding her gravity forsaking her, rose hastily, and beat a retreat.

"So I did," said Mr. Page, staring at the door as Janet said "Good-evening." "Yes, I *was* kind o' kept on the rack, as you may say; and then finally, at last, when she did die, I wasn't prepared for it, and

it took hold of me. There ain't many women like Dorkis."

"She excelled in mince-pies," murmured Miss O'Neil with another glance at the reverend photograph.

"Yes, so she did; but our mince-pies ain't worth speaking of now," said Mr. Page mournfully. "Samanthy is a little girl, and don't understand. But then, I sha'n't get along so always: I've about made my mind up — seems if" —

He spoke from sheer force of habit, but checked himself instantly. Alas, not in season! A hectic spot burned on each of Miss O'Neil's cheeks, and the room grew so still that the spool of thread the cat was chasing over the floor rumbled in her ears as loud as wagon-wheels. She knew, everybody knew, how Mr. Page had "made his mind up," and proposed to nearly every eligible lady in town *except* Miss O'Neil. And now in the natural order of events he had got around at last to her. It was startling; for, in spite of her immense experience in lovers, she was a little out of practice just now, there is no denying it.

The pause grew painful; and, for the sake of breaking, it Mr. Page said in a friendly way, —

"Don't you find it kind o' lonesome living here all alone, ma'am? I should think you would, partic'ly in the winter season."

There could be no mistaking this. What *should* she say? She was resolved not to be too easily won, she had *always* been resolved upon that. "Well, yes, I do," said she coyly, though with much agitation. "Yes, I do. It *is* lonesome, Mr. Page; but I can't see as I should be so much better off at your house after all, — so far out of the village."



"Ought to be going, ma'am; send some more asparagus next week." — PAGE 165.

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“*My* house?” The transition was sudden, and Mr. Page was not famous for tracing the connection of ideas. “*My* house? Oh, well! it is out of the way some; but it’s got a good door-yard and garden and stable all complete. Don’t you like the situation of my house, ma’am?” said he, a little wounded by her disparaging tone.

“Yes, the situation suits me, Mr. Page: only it’s too far out. I like to live near neighbors. I *should* hate to go and leave my neighbors, Mr. Page.”

Ozem stared as only he could stare. Did she think of moving out of town, or what did she think? A terrible foreboding seized him.

“And my church too,” pursued Miss O’Neil piously. “I should have quite a struggle in my mind about that. It wouldn’t be half so handy at your house getting out to meeting.”

Ozem stared if possible still more; and, rising hastily with the instinct of self-preservation, caught up his hat.

“Guess you didn’t get my meaning, ma’am. I was only saying — I only said — Well, I guess I’d better be going now — seems if. Good-evening to you, ma’am,” said he from the edge of the doorstep. Then, ashamed of his rudeness, — for he was a polite man, — he put his head a little way in, and added, —

“Ought to be going, ma’am. Send some more asparagus next week.”

And without further loss of time he left her to her astonishment, and dashed away down street as if pursued by an avenging spirit.

Even to his dim perception it was clear that some-

thing was wrong. “*Have* I got so used to offering myself that I do it when I don’t know it, — seems if? Is she going to marry me whether or no? Oh, if the heavenly Dorkis was only here to help me out of it!”

CHAPTER XXI.

A WILL-O'-THE-WISP.

DURING Janet's absence those energetic people, Mr. Teague and Miss Harlow, had installed her as teacher of elocution in the high school, and settled the terms. Then Judge Davenport, learning what was going on, had negotiated with Miss Harlow for a class of adults by the same teacher, and offered the probate office as a class-room, rent free. Most of the boarders would attend; and Miss Judith Willard the poetess, who dropped in with her brother during the conversation, promised her name.

So when Janet reached home she found the "happy family" rejoicing over her good fortune. Mrs. Satterlee had illuminated the house, and was in mysterious conclave with Mrs. Bangs concerning ice-cream. Janet drew back a little abashed. Was all this merry-making for her? Yet she could not refuse to sing, when she saw the piano open, with Mr. Phenix's flute lying upon it, though she dreaded that flute: it had a reckless disregard of time which gave her a painful longing for Tim's violin. Mr. Phenix could sing well, however; and in "Finnegan's Wake," and other jollities, was not to be excelled. These good people were ready to laugh over one of his rollicking songs, and equally ready

to weep over Janet's plaintive ballads, — the dear, appreciative, kind souls of Quinnebasset! Janet felt, that night, as if she could take the whole village to her heart, and talked enthusiastically to Mr. Phenix, as they still lingered at the piano after the guests were gone, and while Mr. Kyte was holding worsted for Mrs. Whippowill in the parlor.

"You praise them because they fancy you, and are coming to your school? There's nothing remarkable in that!"

"Perhaps not, as my mother was a Quinnebasset woman. You've heard," said Janet, still under the influence of strong excitement, and dashing boldly into the subject, — "you've heard my history, Mr. Phenix?"

Mr. Phenix leaned on the piano, and looked at her.

"Yes, a little of it."

"And did you hear about my — that I'm trying to find my — brother?"

"No: how is that?"

"A brother two or three years older than I, who was sent away, — sent to an orphan-asylum, Mr. Phenix."

"Indeed!"

Janet looked up, and her eyes shot forth some very unnecessary sparkles. There was nothing to be excited about; for Mr. Phenix was listening with polite attention, nothing more.

"We were both born in California."

No sensation: Mr. Phenix was only admiring the motion of her lips in speaking.

"And my brother was put into an orphan-asylum. Mr. Vail put him in, and somebody else took him out."

Mr. Phenix was reminded of "the cat in the well," but was too polite to smile.

"I don't know who took him out, Mr. Phenix; but it was a man from Poonoosac. Oh! did you ever hear of such a boy in Poonoosac?"

"Really, I can't say: I'm afraid I shouldn't know him. How did he look?"

"Oh! I've no idea; but he must have had sandy hair, and I fancy he looks like me, — or like you," she wanted to add.

Mr. Phenix rolled his eyes and reflected.

"I can't recall any young man in Poonoosac who looks in the least like you, Miss Keith. I'm sure I couldn't forget such a face if I'd ever seen it."

"But do try to think. You must have some orphans there!" said Janet imploringly.

"My dear girl, how I wish I could help you! But I know so little of Poonoosac. We left California when I was six years old, and settled in Calais in this State, and have been in Poonoosac only three years."

This simple statement, which the young man would have made long ago if it had been called for, affected Janet strongly. The sparkles died out of her eyes, and she sank suddenly back into the chair from which she had just arisen.

"I wish I could remember," said Mr. Phenix, moved by her emotion. "An orphan boy, sandy-haired? Who took him out? Oh! you don't know. What was your brother's name? Harry? Well, that may be Henry, or Harold, or Harrison. If that's all you know, isn't your information rather meagre?"

"Yes," said Janet humbly; and then, as Mr. Phe-

nix seemed really interested, she answered all his questions about her parents, her home in Brooklyn, and the causes of her leaving it.

“Poor girl, poor girl! I never heard of such a dearth of relatives. So the Mr. Braxton who came to look you up wasn’t your uncle? I thought at the time he didn’t seem much like an uncle.”

“No; and Miss Harlow isn’t my cousin Brenda, except by courtesy.”

“Is that so? Why, Miss Keith, this is a lonesome state of things for you: you do need to find that brother.”

Janet sighed, feeling that she was farther than ever from finding him; indeed, that she had lost him anew. But she took care not to say this to Mr. Phenix: she did not wish him to laugh at her, as the sort of girl who builds Spanish castles. Better that the castle had been destroyed: away with it! Truth is always wholesome, be it never so bitter: still the world did seem, all at once, hard, drab-colored, cold. Her interest in Quinebasset and her new classes died down to a mere spark. She was worse than an orphan, — a brotherless, sisterless waif of humanity, who might die to-night for all any one cared. She had not known, till now, how hard her lot really was, — had not given herself half enough pity.

“Miss Keith,” said Mr. Phenix, touched by her continued sadness, “there’s Col. Morrison of Poonosac: you’ve heard of him? At any rate, he has heard of you, and can tell you all about this if anybody can, for he has kept a record of every event in town for the past fifty years.”

Then, as if a new idea had occurred to him, "Why, let me see: I'm going home on Saturday. Wouldn't you like to ride down with me, and see Col. Morrison yourself?"

Janet's face flushed with gratitude. "How kind, how very kind you are!" said she.

"Don't disturb them," whispered Mrs. Whippowill to Mr. Kyte, who had finished holding the worsted, and was going in to extinguish the chandelier, as a signal that it was time to retire.

Janet, for her part, had not once thought how late it was growing, and might have lingered another half-hour: but the whisper startled her; and, bidding Mr. Phenix a hurried good-night, she reached the hall just as Mrs. Whippowill was softly rustling up the staircase.

"Don't you ever say another word against Mr. Phenix," said she, entering Brenda's room, and arousing her from her first nap. "He isn't my brother, but it softens the blow to have him so interested to help me *find* my brother: he's kindness itself. Kiss me, Brenda, and pet me a little, and tell me I wasn't an idiot to go and dream such nonsense about a young man, just because he had a Scotch complexion and was named Harry."

"Mr. Phenix's name is Hezekiah," corrected Brenda with a mischievous smile. "Mr. Teague told me so to-night."

There was a six-days' rain which delayed the ride to Poonoosac. Meanwhile the river had become majestic, and a jam of logs had collected around the piers of the two bridges; the grass had grown apace, and the

willow-trees had enveloped themselves in gauzy green, — not leaves, but the mere thoughts and foreshadowings of leaves.

“The fourteenth of May!” thought Janet exultantly, as she seated herself in the carriage beside Mr. Phenix and little Katie. “Who knows but this will be a red-letter day in my life?”

For hope had sprung anew. She was not building another air-castle : she was doing a very sensible, sober thing, to go to headquarters and ask leading questions ; nobody could blame her for this.

She was more interested in the scenery than Mr. Phenix could have wished ; and he wondered, with some pique, what sort of young men she had been in the habit of meeting, that she was so indifferent to his remarkable attractions. Mrs. Whippowill had told him that Miss Keith said she “should not think he would be at all dangerous as a flirt,” and this he considered a very slighting remark ; but it would not be his fault if she did not change her mind in that regard.

“What ! is this Poonoosac, this lovely town? Why, I thought last spring it was a quagmire !” cried Janet in delighted surprise, as they came in sight of a lovely village, towering high above the noisy river. How glad she was for her unknown brother if his childhood had been spent in this beautiful spot !

But on driving up the hill to Col. Morrison’s house, they found him gone, and no signs of life about the premises.

“Oh ! have we come for nothing?” said Janet in a tone of bitter disappointment.

So she counted the ride a failure : whereas Mr. Phe-

nix thought she ought to consider it worth something for its own sake, with such a delightful companion as himself, whether the mythical brother were found or not.

Would she go to his house, and wait while he searched the town for the colonel? She knew this was an after-thought, but she went.

He took her to an uninviting cottage a little away from the main street, and with something like an air of apology ushered her in at the green front-door. A lame father in one corner of the sitting-room, looking unkempt and discouraged; a careworn little mother at a table, pressing coat-sleeves; a sickly sister, with her easel in her lap, painting Christmas cards; a coarse-featured sister at the sewing-machine, binding shoes, — this was the family group that met Janet's view. The sisters rose, and murmured in confusion something about going into the parlor; though this must have been a mere form of words, for the parlor was rented by a couple of schoolgirls who "boarded themselves." But the faded little mother did not think of apologies, being quite absorbed in the delight of seeing "Hezzy, my son."

The room was adorned with the regulation plaques, cat-tails, and storks, giving evidence that these pains-taking people aspired to the æsthetic; though forced at the same time to rigid economy, Janet thought, for there was a dismal air-tight stove in the room, surmounted by a black urn, sacred to the memory of the poor dead and choked-up fireplace just behind it: peace to its ashes!

A very respectable family, no doubt: but it did not

seem as if "Hezzy my son," with his fine airs and graces, could really belong to it; and for a moment Janet's dream of his orphanage and adoption returned in spite of her reason. But she was learning the folly of dreams.

"Col. Morrison's folks had gone up to Boston," so Capt. Phenix informed his son; "and the colonel was boarding a spell with Mrs. Steele." Janet's face brightened so much at this intelligence that sister Amanda remarked afterward to sister Susan, that she was "real pretty, after all: she thought in the first place she was homely, and wondered at Hezzy for being so taken up with her."

It was easy enough now to find Col. Morrison; but a gentleman was claiming his attention in Mrs. Steele's dining-room, and Janet had to wait in the parlor. After a weary while the parlor-door was opened two inches, and Mr. Ozem Page's nose appeared at the crack.

"Want to know if that's *you*? Well, I'm done with the colonel now, and you may have a chance. I suppose I may as well tell first as last what my business was," added he confidently: "I wanted to consult him about my taking a second partner. Yes, I s'pose I'm engaged to Miss O'Neil: I've about made my mind up to it, — seems if." With this announcement in a melancholy tone, the nose disappeared, and the crack was closed.

Col. Morrison's eyes were still twinkling with suppressed fun when he turned his attention from Mr. Page's business to Janet's. But all he could say to her was soon said. During the eighty years in which

his hair had been whitening in the town of Poonoosac, he could not remember that any boy had ever been adopted from Brooklyn. What Col. Morrison could not remember could not have happened: he was the walking encyclopædia and pride of the town.

“Why not write to the orphan-asylum, Miss Keith, and ask what became of the boy? Or get Mr. Braxton to ask,” said he, peering over his spectacles, with the shrewd common-sense of eighty years in his sharp black eyes. Janet felt herself shrivel into a very young, insignificant, silly girl.

Write to the asylum? Of course. Why hadn’t she written long ago? What did Tim mean, that he had not suggested it? What did cousin Brenda mean, that she had let her come five miles on a fool’s-errand to make this bright old man laugh at her?

Janet was so quiet on the way home that Mr. Phenix fancied her manner had changed since meeting his plebeian relatives, and was ashamed that he had let her see them. But she had quite forgotten the call, and was only thinking of her intangible brother, and resolving to write to Tim before she slept.

CHAPTER XXII.

A WEDDING.

THE 14th had not been a red-letter day; and it ended in a sharp frost, which laid low the early vegetables, and humbled the pride of those farmers who had boasted that their "Fourth-of-July pease" were "about so high" — a foot, more or less. And, worse than all to Janet, the letter which she mailed so carefully that night went astray, and fell into the hands of the enemy.

Mr. Vail still retained the stolen key, and possessed himself of Janet's letters to Tim, though he never meddled with any others. Was she not his adopted daughter, and had he not a right to inform himself in every possible way of her movements? Now and then, when he was out of the city or not on guard, a stray letter would reach Tim after a long silence, mystifying him by allusions to people and events he had never heard of before. Janey was becoming strangely heedless and forgetful, doled out her news in little scraps, and seemed to have passed a resolution never to answer any of his questions. Still one thing was observable: whatever else she might forget, she never failed to mention Mr. Phenix. She must have discovered by this time that he was not her brother, though she declared that an own brother could not be kinder.

"Everybody helped about getting up my class — especially Mr. Phenix."

"So she *has* a class," thought Tim: "glad she mentioned it."

On reading farther, it appeared that Mr. Phenix was her "most promising pupil."

"Pupil? What next?" said Tim with a frown.

"Cousin Brenda has impressed her friends with the idea that there's nothing like elocution for weak lungs: so my class is made up mainly of invalids. Not a very large class, but it is growing. I was frightened at first to see seven people in the room, all older than I, and very tall and stiff, planted around me like so many pine-trees, and I in the middle like a — well, a sprig of spruce. But Brenda is breezy enough to make even pine-trees bend; and she set them all laughing, whereupon I grew brave, and made them say their letters: and now I think I shall never be so frightened again.

"This isn't as pleasant as my class in Mr. Teague's school; for Mr. Kyte can't understand any thing, and Mrs. Whippowill's falsetto voice drives me wild. But, Tim, they are all lovely, — little and big; and 'I know I'm happy as I can be.' I have the promise of two young scholars in vocal music, besides: so I'm likely to be busy. My prospects are not brilliant, but — just think — I am earning my board! Then I read every day to two invalids, — I wonder I never did such a thing before, — to Henry Meader the sexton, and Maggie Selden, the dearest girl, dying of consumption; and isn't it a blessing to have such people thank you with a soulful look in their eyes! You know all about it from experience, but it's quite new to me. The world isn't cold and hard: aren't you sorry you told me such a wrong story?"

Mr. Braxton folded this letter thoughtfully, and went over to show it to his sister Hattie. Mrs. Vail shaded her eyes with her hand as she read, and said, with a slight trembling of the lips, —

“That dear child! I sha’n’t fret about her any more, for she seems to have found good friends. But you don’t think she means to stay all summer in Quinnebasset, Tim? She won’t if I find I can’t do without her? I feel sometimes” —

Here she paused. What she “felt sometimes” could not be spoken, even to this dear brother; for on some subjects Mrs. Vail had sealed her lips with the marriage-vow.

“But, brother, who is this Mr. Phenix? She always writes about him.”

“Oh! a florid youth who boards in the house, — a young sprig of the law.”

“He is very kind to her, it seems,” said Mrs. Vail musingly; “but I hope Brenda won’t permit any love-affairs. Janet is young.”

Tim rose uneasily. “Have you any message to send her?”

“Give her my dearest love when you write, and tell her I’d write myself, only Papa Vail doesn’t approve.”

She said this with so pathetic a smile that Tim sat down again, and told her a lively story. He was drawing pretty largely, of late, upon his fund of stories; for he seldom came to see Hattie but she needed amusing. He never found her actually in tears; but there was a suspicious swelling of the eyelids, and a mournful droop of the mouth, which convinced him that she was pining for her daughter. He knew also that Mr. Vail’s “nervousness” was increasing, for it was mentioned now by people outside the family.

Still Tim would not tell any of these things to Janet. She had been so sure her father would improve by her

going away, and she took such satisfaction in making her mother's lot easier, that he would not undeceive her. It cost him something to hold his peace; but, though he knew that one word from him would bring her home, that word he would not speak. He meant to do all he could for Hattie; but Hattie must live without her caged bird a little longer, and so must he. The bird should be allowed to try its wings in the free air: it was not fair or wise to call it back to bondage; at least, not yet.

There was nobody to know this sacrifice of Tim's, much less appreciate it. Janet's stay in Quinnebasset might involve serious consequences to himself, though of this he could only form vague conjectures. Cousin Brenda, if she had chosen, might have dispelled some of his apprehensions concerning Mr. H. Peabody Phenix; but Brenda considered letters the pastime of an idle mind, and never wrote a line if she could possibly avoid it. And, as for Tim's making himself unhappy over that "florid youth," the idea had not even occurred to her.

Indeed, up to this time Mr. Phenix himself had never thought of being really serious in his attentions to Miss Keith. He had flirted his way all around the alphabet; but, if he should ever marry anybody, it would be Miss Salina Morse of Calais — probably. Miss Morse thought so — certainly. Still it had been a long engagement, and Mr. Phenix began to think he had been foolish to bind himself so young; and, as he was not at all like the Medes and Persians in regard to keeping promises, perhaps, — if he should see somebody he liked better than Salina — Well, he never

had seen any one yet : Salina was the prettiest girl in the State.

One evening about the last of June, Mr. Teague dropped into the judge's office, after school, to browse among the books, and found Mr. Phenix there alone, smoking a cigar.

"That's right, Teague : sit down and be sociable. I want to ask you if you noticed Mrs. Whippowill nodding on the sly to Mr. Kyte to-day noon, when I was talking German with Miss Keith? Pity if you can't be on good terms with a young lady without this everlasting cry of flirtation!"

Mr. Teague had never experienced any such grievance, and only replied placidly, —

"Oh, well! they needn't fret about Miss Keith. You couldn't break *her* heart if you should try."

This remark was intended to be very soothing; but Mr. Phenix bit his lip, and said quickly, —

"So you think an heiress isn't so easily caught?"

"Oh! I wasn't referring to that: but she's a girl with no nonsense about her; that's what I mean."

"Oh! there's nonsense enough about any of them: they are very much flattered if you show them a little attention," said Mr. Phenix grandly. "Now I think of it, I've always wondered at Miss Keith's running away, though of course she means to go back some day: she isn't quite a fool."

"Well, if she goes back it will be worth a million dollars to her."

"Why, Teague, you don't believe it! I heard her father had money, but didn't know it was any thing like that. Who told you?"

“Miss Harlow.”

“Now, is that so?” said the young law-student with unfeigned eagerness. “Well, I never could endure red hair, but a million dollars will color that! I’m bound to make love to her with my eyes shut: so here goes!” throwing his cigar across the room.

“Phenix, I’m disgusted with you,” said Mr. Teague, who never allowed politeness to interfere with his expressing his mind.

The student laughed.

“Come, Teague, can’t you let a fellow have his little joke without flying out at him in this way?”

“Oh! it was a joke, was it? All right,” returned Mr. Teague, partially re-assured, and condescending to walk home to supper with Mr. Phenix.

But after this the young lawyer often felt the young teacher’s disapproving eye upon him when he conversed with Miss Keith, and thought angrily, —

“The outrageous orthodox prig! I’m glad he never heard of Salina Morse, or he’d be making it his duty to write her.”

The boarders were not slow to observe the growing friendship between Mr. Phenix and Miss Keith, but cousin Brenda implored them not to disturb Janet’s happy unconsciousness by any rude jokes.

“I wish *you* to understand, Oseforia,” said she to Mrs. Satterlee, “the child is only talking German with that boy to keep up her pronunciation. If you knew the restraint her father has always imposed upon her, you would not wonder she likes a little freedom for once in her life. But as for a permanent impression, Oseforia, it’s too absurd! Why, she is head and shoulders above him!”

Mrs. Satterlee smiled politely, but had a secret conviction that old maids are hardly suitable guardians for attractive young girls.

The grand event of the season was Miss O'Neil's unexpected engagement. How had she and Mr. Page discovered their eminent fitness for each other? It seemed like a flash of inspiration.

"He'd have liked a younger woman," said Mrs. Hackett; "but it won't do for some people to be too particular. Besides, she's only six months older than he is; for he went down to Col. Morrison's, and got a true bill of her age."

The Quinnebasset people felt that they owed Miss O'Neil a wedding, out of sheer gratitude for the prospect of getting her finally off their hands. No more of her long scolding visits from house to house, no further need of sending unwilling children to her school to have their pronunciation ruined: it would be strange, indeed, if the village ladies could not afford to celebrate their emancipation.

The 15th of July, the evening of the wedding, was smiled upon by all the stars of heaven, and the fragmentary portion of a moon, — not a new moon, but very appropriately the old one in her second childhood. Miss O'Neil's parlor was a bower of flowers: Mr. Page called them "blows." He came in late with a somewhat neglected air, "little Samanthy" not being equal to "rigging him up." He was thinking, poor man, of the "heavenly Dorkis," and doubting whether she would have approved — a woman of her head-piece — the step he was taking.

The bride, on the contrary, radiant in her new lace

cap and "eloquent brown silk," was haunted by no sad visions, even of rejected lovers; and, knowing nothing of Ozem's misgivings, saw the future open before her in a rosy vista, while Mr. Hinsdale's angelic voice pronounced the marriage benediction.

"Brenda, I'm a married woman," she whispered with blissful eagerness to Miss Harlow, when the ceremony was over, and Mr. Phenix had thoughtfully stepped up and presented a fan, behind which she could hide her blushes, — "I'm a married woman."

It was pleasant to observe that the bridegroom looked more resigned during supper: still he hardly deserved the criticism which Mrs. Whippowill uttered over her ice-cream, to a select audience in the corner: "How can he be so forgetful of his first wife? But men are all alike: so different from us poor constant women!"

"Yes," spoke up Mrs. Bangs, "very different, for we poor women can't marry till we're asked!"

A smile went around; and Mrs. Whippowill buried her face in her handkerchief, feeling that it was the best place for it, though the effect she had intended to give was quite spoiled by that coarse Thurzy Bangs.

At the close of the evening the guests escorted the bridal pair to their pleasant home on the river-bank, — not far from Mrs. Satterlee's, — assured that Ozem was a happier man than he knew, and that time would gradually reconcile him to his fate.

"Do you know what Miss O'Neil asked me to do?" said Janet indignantly to Brenda as they went up to their room. "Asked me to be her bridesmaid, and stand up with Mr. Phenix!"

Brenda coughed, and looked out at the stars.

"Of course he laughed, and so did I, and made the best of it; but what could have put such an idea in that silly creature's head?"

"What, indeed?" said Brenda, depositing her slice of wedding-cake in the closet with a solemn face. "But that was a beautiful fan Mr. Phenix gave the bride. I wonder where he gets all his money."

"Oh, his sister Amanda painted the fan! I do think, Brenda, you're a little unjust to Mr. Phenix."

"Why, what have I ever said, dear?"

"I don't know: only you never say the least thing in his favor, and your tone in speaking of him is always slighting. You consider him a conceited, shallow youth; and he feels it, I assure you. Now, he is not half as conceited as you think. I hadn't known him two days before he asked me some question in history as meekly as possible: do you call *that* conceited?"

"If you'd seen his family, cousin Brenda, you'd pity him. They have no appreciation of him, none whatever; and his father doesn't like his studying law, wants to drag him down to his own level. I can fancy how trying Capt. Phenix must be, for I've had some experience in fathers."

Janet's cheeks had been flushing, and her eyelids winking fast in her defence of the injured young man; and Brenda looked at her thoughtfully.

"Have I been too hard on Mr. Phenix? I did say once that his name was Hezekiah, but I will be careful in future," said she quietly.

Her words were light; but she lay awake a long while recalling Janet's looks and tones, and wonder-

ing at her spirited defence of Mr. Phenix on such very slight provocation. It struck Brenda that it would be dangerous to call forth many defences of the sort: it might give Janet the feeling that she was the young man's champion.

“I shall never dare say another disparaging word of him, or it may push her to extremes. There is a contrary vein in Janet, as I well know; and of all things I dread a love-affair on my hands at my time of life.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

FLIRTING ?

JANET came down-stairs at two o'clock of a very warm afternoon, dressed for the street in gauzy black. Mr. Phenix looked out from the parlor, and thought the costume, with its entire absence of color, very becoming to her rich complexion.

"Oh, Mr. Meader's funeral!" said he, dropping his newspaper. "May I go with you, Miss Keith?"

Janet assented with some surprise; for Mr. Phenix had never visited Henry Meader in his long illness, or expressed any interest in him that she could remember.

Miss Harlow was tripping down-stairs, drawing on her gloves as she ran; and the sight of her aroused Judge Davenport to a sense of his duty.

"I'm ashamed to be outdone by you ladies," said he, springing up and seizing his hat and cane.

By that time the impetus had reached Mrs. Whippowill.

"Is it so very warm?" said she, rolling up her work. "I believe I'll go with you if you'll wait for me;" and of course nobody reminded her that she had declared ten minutes ago "nothing would induce her to go out in that broiling sun." Her garb was less sombre than usual. "People had told her that a crape

veil was unhealthy;" and in dropping that she had also allowed herself the slight alleviation of lace and lilac ribbon.

Mr. Phenix and Janet walked on in advance, under the shade of a brown-silk umbrella.

"Poor 'Jun'! I'm afraid he is losing ground," said Mr. Phenix in an undertone. Then, as Janet did not respond: "Why, Miss Keith, how sad you seem to-day! Has any thing happened?"

"I have no brother after all, Mr. Phenix," said Janet, her lip quivering. "My brother Harry died fifteen years ago."

"Ah? then it's rather late to mourn for him."

Mr. Phenix was not without feeling, and was really sorry for Janet; but girls are always too emotional, and he considered it the duty of young men, as their superiors, to give the poor things broader and more rational views of life, — to nip in the bud all hysterical tendencies.

"When did you get the news, if one can call it news?"

Janet did not answer for a moment, being somewhat repelled by his light tone.

"I had a letter from Mr. Braxton last night. It seems Mr. Braxton has been investigating this matter for some time, though I did not know it. — There, now, let us talk of something else."

"You had very romantic ideas about that brother; but it isn't best to build too much on uncertainties," said Mr. Phenix instructively. "And if you had found the young man he might have turned out a trial, — probably would. Besides, you'll learn some time, that there

are friends who prove nearer and dearer than brothers, Miss Keith."

Janet said nothing, but changed her pace slightly, for they were not keeping step.

"I fear this news will affect me quite as much as you," resumed Mr. Phenix; "for now you will naturally be going away."

"Going away? Where?"

"Why, to Brooklyn. You said you came to Maine partly in the hope of finding your brother."

"Oh! but I never had a thought of going back," said Janet positively. "They are much better there without me."

"Now, that is impossible: you know they can't be better off without you," said Mr. Phenix, and fell into a short revery.

He liked Janet exceedingly well, all the better because he felt that as yet she did not fully appreciate him. She was certainly better bred and educated than Miss Salina Morse, if less beautiful: still he did not approve or understand these high-flown notions in an heiress. She must not, should not, throw away a splendid fortune for a mere caprice: he would talk to her some time, and persuade her to go back. Not yet: he must wait till he had gained some influence over her; girls will do a great deal for a man they love.

Salina was a milliner; Miss Keith, a millionnaire.

"Say she has half a million,—even a quarter!" As Mr. Phenix mentally repeated these high-sounding figures, they seemed to steal like balm into his wounded heart, which had been frost-bitten by poverty, if we may so express it, from his very cradle. Still, he had

made no plans as yet: he was only drifting; and he still wrote to Salina.

Arrived at the house of mourning, they found it already more than half filled with friendly neighbors; while so many more were on the way that Mr. Kyte had ordered two dozen chairs set out in the front-yard, in the blazing sun. The Satterlee boarders sought the shelter of the house; and here it was pitiful to see how "Henry's wife's folks from the Aroostook" had managed every thing as badly as possible. Mr. Meader had been a man of some refinement; and Janet thought he would be pained, if he knew he was lying in his "white sleep" holding a handful of ill-assorted flowers, — a "saint's lily," variegated pinks, heliotrope, and yellow roses; while on the reversed lid of the coffin lay a wreath of purple fuchsias and scarlet geraniums, with their green leaves. Henry's wife had been his life's trial; and she sat now in a wooden rocking-chair, with her back to her husband, actually hitting the coffin sometimes, as she rocked to and fro in what might be considered charitably a stupor of grief. "Henry's wife's folks" had neglected to supply the Rev. Mr. Hinsdale with a table; and he was obliged to stand, holding the big family Bible in his hands as he read. They had forgotten to sweep down the cobwebs, or remove the cluster of dusty dried ferns pinned last year over the mantel. There were coarse pictures hanging about, which had always offended Henry's eye; one representing a small cross, with a large calla-lily growing at its foot on a stem an inch high. Henry's wife, coarse and self-willed, had always had her own way; and the paper on the walls was of her choos-

ing, — blue moss-rosebuds climbing, like ambitious grape-vines, from the dirty “mopboard” to the ceiling.

Janet could not smile as she met Mr. Phenix’s roguish eye. The ill-kept house and tawdry furnishings were quite familiar to her; and she pitied poor “shiftless” Henry Meader to-day more than ever, as she thought what a hampered, wretched life he had led, — a man who was worthy of better things.

“I’m glad he is out of it all, and that that cruel woman won’t follow him to heaven to scold him. But what does it all mean? Why is it that so many people in this world are never happy? It must be, as I once heard a minister say, that God cares a great deal more about our goodness than he does about our happiness.”

Janet would not have admitted it to any human being, for fear of ridicule, but she was wearing black to-day in memory of her dead brother; and when at last the neighbors all walked to the burying-ground, and she and Mrs. Loring sang, by request, “The Sweet By-and-by” and “The Shining Shore” beside Henry Meader’s open grave, it was the real grief and disappointed hope of her own heart that moved all her hearers to tears. She fancied she was standing in Evergreen Cemetery in Deering, beside a little neglected grave on which the grass had been growing for fifteen years.

Mr. Phenix was not far off, shading his eyes with his hat-brim, and looking at the young soprano-singer with something warmer than pride and more tender than approval.

“Do you know what Quinnebasset people say of

you, Miss Keith?" said he, as she stopped at Mrs. Selden's, on her way home, to read "Near and Heavenly Horizons" to Maggie. "They say you are an angel of mercy."

He was only quoting the general voice, but Janet was a little impatient of such undeserved praise. Since she had seen cousin Brenda going about doing good, spending freely her little stock of strength for the suffering and needy, she began to long to be of real use in the world; and thus far what had she done? Surely it was a very little thing to read and sing, carry fresh flowers, and air hot pillows. A few times she had watched with her cousin at the bedsides of the sick, pinching herself to keep awake. It was severe, but she meant to do it as often as Brenda would permit: a young, strong girl ought not to flinch from little hardships.

Still, it was pleasant to know that the villagers loved her. She, of all people, *must* be loved, or she should die! This was the happiest summer of her life. Though probably as awkward and plebeian as ever, she had forgotten to grieve over her defects: for nobody here was like Papa Vail; nobody criticised little faults of manner, or discussed the "minor morals."

Then, she had been able to wear her last year's dresses with no shock to public feeling. The Quinnebasset ladies had generally good taste, but were too high-minded to be slaves to fashion.

August came, dry and hot. It had been a peculiarly oppressive summer; and Miss Harlow seemed drooping, yet would take no rest from her literary labors, having been thrown sadly in arrears by last winter's

illness. She was confined to her bed one day by a violent headache, and Janet went down to the kitchen to ask Mrs. Bangs for a cup of coffee. She found the good woman laughing quietly to herself, as she stood rolling tarts in the pantry.

“You ought to have seen Mr. Phenix when he met me a while ago with a mug of yeast in my hand: he was the pleased-est creature, all bows and smiles. If he should meet me every day carrying yeast, I don’t know but he’d die of joy.”

“His manners are good, Mrs. Bangs: is there any harm in that?”

“No: his ways would have just suited your father, but I didn’t know it was the kind *you* liked,” returned Mrs. Bangs, eying Janet sharply as she “clapped” her tarts into the oven. “So you’re all off on a picnic supper to Sunset Hill, and I hope my cooking will turn out well

“*But,*” added the widow irrelevantly, “Mrs. Hackett tells me folks are making remarks about you and him. *I was beat!*”

“Why, Mrs. Bangs!” said Janet, standing for a moment, flushed and uncomfortable; and then without waiting for the coffee she went quickly up-stairs.

When the picnic party set off with their baskets for Sunset Hill, she remarked at the last moment that her head ached, and she believed she would not go. Everybody remonstrated, and it was evident that Mr. Phenix felt much disappointed.

After they were all gone she threw herself on the broad lounge between the front windows, glad of a little rest and solitude. Her head really ached, but

that was not all. She was thinking of what Mrs. Hackett had said, and feeling strangely uncomfortable.

"Why will he always walk with me? Miss Sanders doesn't like it, I know. And what a stupid way the boarders have of marching off in pairs!" thought she, closing her eyes wearily as she heard the sound of approaching footsteps. Was it Mrs. Bangs perhaps? She opened her eyes, and saw that it was Mr. Phenix.

"Why, I thought you had gone."

"I didn't care to go without you," said he with tender emphasis. "If you don't mind, I'd much rather stay here."

Janet sat upright, looked down at the flowers in the carpet, and — remembered Mrs. Hackett. Why had he come back? It seemed singular. He drew up a chair, and seated himself beside her, resting his hand upon the lounge.

"You must know that I don't care for any thing unless you are in it, Miss Keith."

"But you ought to have gone," said she faintly. "I'm very dull to-night, and don't feel like talking."

"Very well: let us sit here, then, and watch the sunset."

Instead of that, however, he watched her face.

"It is not necessary to talk all the time: I'm sorry you feel so tired to-night."

She wished he would turn his eyes away.

"Isn't that a lovely elm at the corner of the front yard, Mr. Phenix? I've always admired it, with the woodbine creeping up its trunk."

"Yes. Do you know, Miss Janet, it seems to me

as if you and I have been acquainted all our lives? How do you explain that?"

"Does it? Well, it is three months since I came here, on the 13th of April. Do look over there by the river, and see those graceful white birches leaning over the water's edge! I think the front windows of a house ought always to face the river: don't you?"

"Yes. The 13th of April. I remember we came here on the same day, though not together. It seems strange now to think we had never met before, — that there was even a time when I did not know you, Miss Janet."

"Does it?" said she, fanning herself.

"Yes; for you fill so large a place in my life now, so different a place from any one else." He leaned gracefully forward as he spoke, and rested his right hand on her arm; but she moved her arm away, laughing.

"That sounds as if I must be different from other people, Mr. Phenix. I'm sure I hope there's nothing peculiar about me."

"Indeed, but there is," replied he with an admiring gaze which took in every thing, even the objectionable hair which the million dollars had already colored to his taste, — "a peculiar charm."

He spoke sincerely too. Alas for Miss Salina Morse!

"Oh! I don't like your saying that," said Janet, blushing, and moving farther away. "I didn't ask you to flatter me, and I'm not used to being flattered."

"But of course you've been told that you are very beautiful?"

“Never! My friends don’t approve of wrong stories. If they did, I shouldn’t approve of my friends.”

“How very sharp! Who are your friends? You seem to leave me out of the number.”

“My friends? Why, you know some of them; Miss Harlow for one, and you’ve seen Mr. Braxton. *They* talk to me as if I were a sensible being, Mr. Phenix.”

“Mr. Braxton seems to be a paragon,” said the young man, taking Janet’s fan and playing with it. “I remember he came all the way to Maine to look you up, and I never quite liked it in him either.”

There was a pause of some length; and when he spoke again it was in German, in an agitated tone, while the fan trembled unmistakably in his fingers:—

“These friends of yours, do you love them so very much? *Could you love another?*”

Janet had never seen him moved like this before. What, precisely, did he mean? How could she answer such a question?

But at this interesting moment, while she was still hesitating what to say, Master Teddy burst into the room with the prosaic announcement that a cow was in the garden, and Mr. Phenix was expected to drive her out. This was the end of sentiment for the evening, though not of speculation; for Janet lay awake at least an hour that night, pondering over the disjointed dialogue. A lover was a being quite new to her experience; and were there really any positive signs to distinguish him from a flirt?

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONSULTING BRENDA.

WHEN Janet had made the unfeeling remark that Mr. Phenix was "not dangerous," she had not meant dangerous to herself, or even thought of such a thing. To the young girl, love was as yet a vague, far-off vision; and her ideal lover a grand, ethereal being, in no way resembling Mr. H. Peabody Phenix.

The only trouble was, the wrong figure had appeared now upon the stage, and the ideal was obliged to retreat into the background. It often happens so in real life, and the great lesson is to adjust one's mind to these new and unexpected phases. It would be comparatively easy to go through the world if precisely those things would happen which one is prepared for, and never any others.

Here was a young man, the farthest possible from the hero Janet had in her mind, not old enough or wise enough to be "looked up to," "gloriously handsome," yet rather light-minded, who had fallen in love with her; and how was she going to dispose of him?

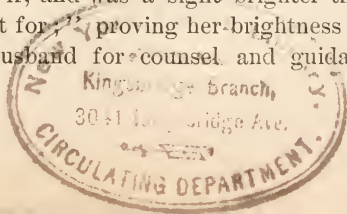
Or wasn't it love? Janet was totally inexperienced, and could not tell positively but it might be a modern style of flirtation. That had been a queer little dialogue which Teddy broke off the other night; but, if

it had meant what it seemed to mean, why didn't Mr. Phenix resume and finish it? He referred to it next day as if it had settled something between them; whereas of course it had settled nothing, and had merely served to mystify Janet.

He seemed to think he had the right to talk to her in a lower, more confidential tone; and pinned her down to a private chat in the evening, rendering Miss Sanders quite unhappy, and giving Mrs. Whippowill occasion for manifold "remarks."

What could Janet do? She could answer him in monosyllables sometimes, or in a slightly acid tone; she could refuse to talk German, or to walk with him: but could she, as a young lady of any delicacy, fling out the startling remark, "We are not engaged, Mr. Phenix"? When had he ever intimated that they were engaged? She felt restless and perplexed; and, being of a very confiding nature, longed to talk with cousin Brenda, and ask her how people managed such indefinite affairs. But the small lady was strangely unsympathetic and perverse, asked no leading questions, and seemed to have grown suddenly deaf and blind.

The following day Janet sat with her in the "writing-den" eating oranges, while the scent of the new-mown hay stole in at the open window from a loaded "rack" which Ozem Page was driving by. Ozem had lost his desolate, widowed look, and was beginning to trace the finger of Providence in his rather compulsory marriage. The second wife "did a'most beat Dorkis at cooking, — seems if, and was a sight brighter than folks gave her credit for," proving her brightness by looking up to her husband for counsel and guidance in a way



quite new and delightful to the hitherto unappreciated man. She had not made the little niece "step round" as had been predicted; for the child only laughed at her new aunt's incoherent scoldings, and thrived on the excellent food which came in with the new dispensation.

"Cousin Brenda," said Janet, shutting her fruit-knife, and then pausing while she opened it again.

It never seemed quite convenient to allude to Mr. Phenix; and really, what was there to be said?

"Cousin Brenda, do you think a girl in her teens ought to be engaged? Fie, that wasn't what I meant at all! Can she be engaged, and — not know it?"

A look of quiet amusement curved the corners of Miss Harlow's mouth; and, seeing this, Janet began again hurriedly, "Of course I was supposing a case. Now, there's Jessie Wilder" —

"You surprise me! Is Jessie engaged?"

"No, oh, no indeed! — What a warm day! — But I do think flirting is very silly; and that reminds me, cousin Brenda, I've been speculating lately a good deal on — well, on death and marriage."

Miss Harlow calmly dissected her orange.

"And you look as if you'd solved both those mysteries, cousin Brenda, — as if they couldn't puzzle you any more."

"Really! What a wise face I must wear! — not exactly human, I am afraid. But if you'd like light on either of these mysteries I'll do my best. Which will you discuss?"

"*Death!*" cried Janet, mortified and discouraged, as Miss Harlow dropped her eyes to hide a roguish twinkle.

“Well, death is the only way out of marriage, or ought to be : so the subjects may be classed together.”

“Yes,” said Janet, arranging some orange-seeds in her left palm in the form of a cross, “it’s the only way out ; and marriage is dreadful when it isn’t beautiful. I’m glad for Henry Meader that *his* is over. I never shall forget how that miserable wife scolded him the last day he lived, for breaking a cup. Don’t you suppose he married her for her pretty face? She must have been pretty once, and perhaps he hadn’t known her long. Don’t you think people should know each other for years and years, and be ever so long engaged, before they dare marry?”

“Certainly. Nobody should marry before the age of fifty, or at the earliest forty,” returned Miss Harlow with perfect gravity.

Janet was baffled again. What had she said that was silly?

“I’ve been thinking of mother,” said she, “poor little mother Vail, who had only a six-weeks’ engagement, as she has told me herself. And I’ve always wondered what her friends were thinking of, not to break it off in the beginning.”

“Her friends tried to break it off : that was the very trouble, — one friend in particular,” replied Miss Harlow, growing suddenly serious. “Harriet Braxton, like many young girls, was perverse, and shouldn’t have been meddled with. — Child, I would march to the stake sooner than interfere with such a strictly personal matter again,” concluded Brenda, setting her plate on the table with the air of setting the subject down with it.

Janet understood that she was not to bring up Mr. Phenix, and felt quite extinguished. If cousin Brenda fancied she had wrought mischief to Harriet Braxton years ago, in a real affair of the heart, was that any reason she should be so short now with a poor young girl who was not in love, only a little perplexed and inexperienced?

“I’m a weak creature, and she means to teach me self-reliance. Shall I ever understand that I’ve no claim on cousin Brenda, and that she hasn’t the least conception how I love her?” thought Miss Harlow’s youthful admirer very sorrowfully.

During the long silence that ensued, Ozem Page passed the window again with his empty “rack;” followed by Mr. Kyte, bringing the mail. Janet ran down, and possessed herself of two letters; one to “Miss Janet Vail Keith” from Jessie Wilder, and a short one to Miss Harlow from Tim. Instead of flourishing them aloft on her return, she held them half-forgotten in her hand.

“Maggie Selden is dead,” said she in a subdued tone: “she died at four o’clock this afternoon.”

The news was not unexpected; but the two women sat for some time with their letters unopened in their laps, musing and talking of the young life that had just ebbed away.

“It is hard to comprehend,” said Brenda, “that that frail girl has gathered in at last her mite from the great storehouse, and that henceforth the world holds nothing more for her.”

“Yes: and to think of the pain she has borne; and to think how dearly John Loring has loved her, and

how he will grieve! It seems very strange," said Janet, — "strange it should be allowed."

"I know it. In this shadow of suffering in which we are all enveloped, a sublime and glorious mystery overarches us," said Brenda thoughtfully. "But there is light behind it, and it shines into our very eyes sometimes."

Janet shook her head.

"It shines like faintly twinkling stars, I admit," went on Brenda; "but it grows clearer, the longer we look."

"You mean faith," said Janet, feeling like "the little plant that lived in the cellar."

"Yes: without faith in Providence, Maggie's twinkling of a life would seem like a shattered bark before the darkly gathering storms of fate; but by the light of faith we see the little bark sailing into a sure haven. We know Maggie has only died to an infancy of weakness, to be born into a womanhood of strength."

"Yes, but — John Loring?"

"John has forever, and so has she. This life is only the beginning, Janet."

"That is true, but it is very long sometimes; and what if John should marry some one else, and forget poor Maggie?"

"I hope he will marry some one else, but I'm sure he will not forget Maggie."

"Well, but I always wondered about these people who marry twice," persisted Janet, as Judge Davenport just then entered the gate, and looked up at the window. "What do you do with them in heaven?"

"I leave them. The conditions of the future life

are a profound mystery, and it is folly to speculate about them. Only this I do know : true love — love that is of the soul — is and must be immortal.”

How did she know so surely? She looked as if it had been revealed to her. Was this the same cousin Brenda who had just turned away impatiently from the mere suggestion of a romance? Evidently it was not the theme that had repelled her, but the person. She regarded Mr. Phenix as not worth talking about. Well, was he? Janet’s opinions had always varied as to that, but just now it seemed to her that she held him in very high esteem. She felt antagonistic, and accused everybody of being unjust to the much-under-rated young man, whose chief faults were his beauty and affability, and his consequential way of holding his head.

She and Brenda now read and exchanged their letters. Fanny Curtis’s father had failed, so Jessie wrote ; and now, without stopping to murmur at fate, Fanny longed to strike out for herself as Janet had done, and be of some use to the family.

“She’ll do something remarkable : it’s in her,” said Janet admiringly.

Tim’s letter began : —

“I once knew a young girl named Janet Vail ; but it now seems so long ago, that, if still living, she must have become a very old woman. If she receives my letters she never answers them, and I consider her a deaf-mute. Drop me a line. Brenda, I implore you. Her mother is seriously afraid she is ill. This silence of nearly two months is becoming unbearable to me as well as Hattie, and if it goes on another week I may appear to you in person to have it explained.”

“Why, what does possess Tim? Two months? He is talking nonsense. Didn’t I write him last week, and haven’t I written him every week without fail? I’ll tell him I’ve as much cause as he to complain,” cried Janet, taking out her writing-desk, “for not a question of mine does *he* ever answer.”

“There’s something wrong,” said Brenda, her mind naturally reverting to Rufus Vail as in some way the cause of the wrong: “so this letter you are writing now may go astray, like the others; and if it should, perhaps Tim will come as he threatens.”

“What! come to Maine? How I wish he would! But he won’t care enough for that,” said Janet, dropping her pen, humming a tune thoughtfully, and breaking off in the middle of it to say, “I can’t make Tim seem quite natural to me; and that’s why I’m a little sensitive, I suppose. He’s just as good as ever, but there’s a difference that I can’t explain. I didn’t mention it to you when he was here last spring; but I began to feel it even then, and I’ve felt it since in the tone of his letters,—a sort of gradually increasing distance.”

“Oh, folly! If there was ever a steadfast friend”—

“Yes, oh, yes! cousin Brenda: don’t I know that? It isn’t—it’s only that it takes you so long to find out that you don’t belong to anybody in particular, that you haven’t any family ties!—not even the brother you thought you had, for he was in heaven all the while.

“So when the friends you’ve loved best turn away a little,—if it’s ever so little,—it reminds you that you are all alone in the world, cousin Brenda, a sort of superfluous girl. Which you ought to have felt and

understood all along, from the very first," went on Janet, controlling herself.

"Don't try to say any thing, cousin Brenda. I know just how it is with you and Tim both, and I'm thankful for every spark of love you feel for me; but *you* have so many others, you know.

"There! I didn't mean to make all this moan. I was only going to remark that Tim won't come to Quinnebasset again just to see me. He won't care enough to come: why should he?"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ISLANDS.

BRENDA fainted that evening, as she was leaving her room to go down to tea. It was the second time she had fainted that week.

"This will never do," said Miss Sanders, as Janet entered the dining-room alone, looking broken-hearted. "I've always told Miss Harlow not to work so hard. But she has a beautiful mind: she throws off those prose-poems of hers as molten stars throw off comets, and keeps on growing."

"I don't profess to know much about molten stars," rejoined Mr. Teague bluntly; "but I doubt if Miss Harlow can keep on growing, unless she has a rest."

"I don't know much about moulting stars, either, — a new process, likely," thought Mrs. Bangs, who had come in with a plate of toast. She had never felt the slightest respect for Miss Sanders since she asked that highly cultured young lady one day, —

"Is Mrs. Selden pretty smart?" and received the unblushing reply: "I do not understand you, Mrs. Bangs."

"If the girl can't understand the English language, I sha'n't waste much of it on her," thought the rustic widow, and had thenceforth, as nearly as possible, ignored her existence.

“Miss Harlow ought to go to the seashore: she ought now, really,” said Mr. Kyte, so vehemently that his eyeglasses flew into his plate; their flights now being restrained by a string, thanks to Mrs. Whippowill, who felt a matronly care of all the gentlemen boarders.

The judge made no comment, but after tea strayed out with Janet as far as the “heater-piece,” and asked her how she thought her cousin would like to go to Peak’s Island for a month. His friend, Mrs. Pomeroy of Portland, owned a furnished cottage there, but was now at the mountains, and the cottage would be vacant for some weeks.

“It will be a very inexpensive outing for Miss Harlow,” said the judge considerably. “You and Mrs. Loring could go with her, and keep house.” (It would appear that he had already conferred with Mrs. Loring on the subject.) “I’m sure Mrs. Pomeroy would be glad to have the cottage occupied, and she could send me the key by mail.”

Janet thanked the judge warmly for his kind interest in her dear Brenda; and it came to pass that three days after this, on a warm, breathless morning in August, five precious souls set off for Portland in a new Quinnebasset car that smelt strongly of varnish; while the sun rolled like a brazen ball in the sky, and the golden-rod glittered feebly by the wayside.

Of these five souls, two were gentlemen; and one, as might have been predicted, was Mr. H. Peabody Phoenix. It cost him no self-denial to leave his law-studies for any length of time; and the benevolent judge, who really needed a vacation, was obliged to remain at home

to keep the office open. Janet's face was eloquent of disappointment as she bade the kind old man good-by; and there was also a glance of sparkling indignation in her eye as Mr. Phenix took his seat beside her in the car.

The second gentleman of the party was Mr. Kyte; who went solely to look out for "the dear ladies," fearing, not without reason, that Mr. Phenix was hardly the sort of person to make himself generally useful. The world never knows its heroes, and nobody suspected that this journey cost Mr. Kyte's chivalrous breast a pang. His going was looked upon as a matter of course, for everybody was aware of his life-long devotion to all womankind. To hold worsted for the angelic creatures, to hand them to their carriages, to be, in a sort, a footstool for their charming feet, had been to this gentle-hearted man the serious business of his life. The ladies all seemed willing to be adored; but, when he singled out any especial object for his attentions, he had always found her exceedingly coy. Many a maiden had assured him she was averse to matrimony, and then had found her objections overruled by some happier swain. Many a gay wedding had the undervalued Mr. Kyte attended with a button-hole bouquet pinned above his aching heart. And now, warned by these repeated disappointments, he had grown wary enough to conceal his infatuation for the pensive Mrs. Whippowill, who had won his love chiefly by making him wait upon her. No one, not even she, knew how she was riveting his chains every time she tied a bit of silk about his little finger to remind him of an errand; nor how these chains tuggea

at his heart as he turned away and left her, and knew to his sorrow that the judge was to stay at home.

The travellers had, part of the way, the pleasant society of Mr. and Mrs. Ozem Page, who were making a bridal trip to Bangor; the bridegroom having finished haying the day before. Mrs. Page was radiant, and redolent of lozenges, and took the opportunity to tell Miss Harlow she "didn't see how women ever got along without a man to look after them."

Janet secretly thought there was such a thing as being too much "looked after." Her fresh, spirited face was as stern as she could make it, whenever Mr. Phenix inclined his head toward her to offer a remark or a slight attention.

Cousin Brenda, comfortably reclining upon a couch of shawls provided by Mr. Kyte, looked askance at the young people with a merry light in her half-veiled eyes. When presently Mr. Phenix laid his arm on the back of the seat, within a hand's-breadth of his companion's shoulder, Janet drew back with a degree of dignity that ought to have been quite awful to any but a very hardened and misguided young man; and the obnoxious arm was speedily withdrawn.

Janet had vaguely, very vaguely, thought for the past few days that perhaps she had been "flirting;" and, conscience-stricken at the bare possibility of such a crime, her repentance was swift and sure. Sometimes when Mr. Phenix spoke she was "contradictious," sometimes she even averted her head without a reply; and it was only when she leaned forward to speak to Brenda that her firmly-cut mouth relaxed into sweetness. The effect of this discipline upon Mr. Phenix was quite bewildering.

“May I ask wherein I have given offence, Miss Keith?” asked he with a bending air of deference, and a softened voice, after they had reached Portland, and were on board the steamboat going to the island.

Janet had no answer ready; and he arose and went to a short distance, leaving her to her own reflections.

Poor Mr. Phenix! What had he done, indeed? His manners were those of a finished gentleman; and, if he contrived to throw into them a certain air of protective tenderness, how was she to complain of it? What could she say that would not compromise her womanly delicacy and self-respect? Many girls of eighteen are able to meet such little dilemmas with playful adroitness; they can put a young man in his proper place as easily as they can set up a ninepin, and with as little waste of thought: but Janet was exceedingly straightforward and inexperienced; indeed, I am afraid her simplicity was rather unique. She longed to impress upon the mind of Mr. H. Peabody Phenix the fact that he was going too far; but an utterly crushing sensation came over her as she twirled her parasol wildly, and reflected that she had herself to blame for it all. That folly about their relationship had colored her feelings from the first: her liking for him had begun in a mistake; and, after the mistake was corrected, the liking had still remained, because from that time he had shown her very marked kindness, and she could not help feeling grateful for it.

“And more than grateful, yes, flattered,” said she to herself in strict confidence, as she saw Mr. Phenix coming slowly toward her again. “Janet Keith, you’ve been a downright goose, and you needn’t blame

anybody but yourself. This is the first young man who ever paid you a scrap of attention ; and you're so vain that you've liked it, and let it go on and on, till now you're in the middle of a whirlpool, circling round and round, faster and faster, and it's your business to get out of it if you can, but *don't* you blame Mr. Phenix."

She had got as far as this in her penitential reflections, when the young man stood before her in an attitude of deep despondency. It seemed to him that fabulous wealth was slipping out of his reach, — wealth he had regarded as fully secured.

"Here we are at Peak's Island," remarked Janet, as the boat stopped.

"Yes," was the melancholy reply.

They walked up the landing without another word, Mr. Phenix dutifully loaded with the pond-lilies he had given Janet ; but he did not offer her his arm.

"What pretty cottages ! O solitude ! where art thou ?" said Miss Harlow, panting a little, and leaning somewhat heavily upon Mr. Kyte as they passed along the road that skirted the bay.

Mr. Kyte had of course attended to the luggage, and now bore a basket in his left hand, which he took care to fill with various viands as they passed a grocery-store.

Mrs. Pomeroy's cottage was in a comparatively retired spot, on an elevation commanding a fine view of the sea. It was built after the Cuban plan, — one story, with high peaked roof, and was finished inside with smooth pine boards instead of plaster. It contained one large living-room, with two smaller sleeping-

rooms, opening into an extension on either side ; and at the extremity was a small kitchen, flanked by a tiny wood-shed.

The cottage was olive-colored, with olive-green trimmings, and from one extension to the other ran a veranda with awnings. Woodbines bordered the side-windows, and twined around the railings.

“ Beautiful ! We shall be very happy here : I feel it in the air,” said Mrs. Loring, with a peep at the grocery-basket, as Mr. Kyte turned the key, and ushered them into the house.

But Mr. Phenix lingered beside Janet, with his hand on the veranda-railing.

“ Do you think, Miss Keith, it is any thing more than fair that you should tell me what I’ve done to offend you ? I have felt all day as if I wanted to sink into the earth, and this is not the first time either. Perhaps you are hardly aware how strangely you have treated me for several days.”

The young man spoke in a deeply injured tone, but withal so humbly and reverently that Janet’s childlike, credulous soul was stirred within her. She did not love him in the least ; but this was not a question of love, it was simply one of Christian kindness and civility. She had been behaving like a barbarian, and ought to be, and was, heartily ashamed of herself. Of course, under the circumstances, an apology was in order.

Simple, leal Janet ! She had a royal munificence of soul, that never rested content with simply acknowledging a wrong. If she said any thing, she was generally in danger of saying too much ; but this she did not know.

“Mr. Phenix,” said she, giving him her hand with frank cordiality, “I’ve felt cross all day, and for ever so many days; and I hope you’ll forgive me, please, for you’ve done nothing wrong. Only, only,” — here it was very hard to go on, — “only, if you’ll let me be plain with you, Mr. Phenix, your manners now and then are a little too — too polite. I’m not used to it, and would rather be let alone sometimes.”

There, that was a brave little speech. She felt that she had explained every thing now, and he could not fail to understand, henceforth, that more reserve of manner was expected. She quite wondered at her own boldness, not to say rudeness.

Unfortunately, however, she spoke with a gracious, winning smile, which quite neutralized the effect of her speech. Mr. Phenix looked at her face, and was not appalled by her words. He had not made her character a study: it did not occur to him that such a smile could come straight up from the depths of a troubled conscience, and mean nothing else in the world but penitence and a desire for forgiveness.

No, she was certainly in love with him; and, as she turned in embarrassment to look at the sloops in the harbor, that million dollars shone conspicuously again in the deep-toned gold of her hair. Eureka! But she had a shy, delicate nature, quite charming and unusual, and he must strive for a more satisfactory manner toward her: he must be cool, but not too cool; mildly attentive, but not obtrusive. It would be an interesting and difficult study; but he was possessed of great tact, he could surely attain this ultimate perfection.

“I’m so glad I haven’t fallen out of your good graces. I don’t know what should have become of me if I had,” said he in a tone that was cool, though not too cool, as he opened the door for her to pass in; and it was precisely five days since Janet had felt so light-hearted as now.

The interior of the cottage had been furnished with odds and ends from Mrs. Pomeroy’s house in Portland; chairs of various patterns, a cretonne lounge, several brackets and pictures, an old astral lamp adapted to kerosene, a centre-table covered with a plaid shawl and bearing a glass tank suitable for jelly-fish and other “specimens:” these, with a rickety spy-glass in the corner, comprised nearly all the furniture.

Mr. Phenix looked about with a withering air of half-concealed contempt; but Mr. Kyte brushed up his “widow’s peak” apologetically, and assured the ladies that “those two front windows looking out on the iridescent sea would convert the meanest abode into a palace: they would, now, really.”

The kitchen shelves contained rows of miscellaneous dishes; and the stove was cracked, with warped covers which Mrs. Loring said “puffed up in the middle like well-raised biscuits;” all which defects Mr. Kyte duly apologized for, as he filled the wood-box preparatory to going fishing. At five a “consolidated tea” was served, when all agreed upon the superlative flavor of the potatoes and fried cunners.

The charm of the island life began to work. Brenda slept that night like an infant; and Janet found her next day reclining under a scrub-oak at some distance from the cottage, her little tired hands clasped

upon her bosom, and her happy eyes looking away to the quiet, many-tinted harbor. She had just been repeating to herself, as she felt her own and other people's cares slipping away from her, —

“And this is peace ! I have no need
Of friends to talk, or books to read :
The holy silence is His voice ;
I lie, and listen, and rejoice.”

“This isn't half as good a place as I have found,” said Janet ; “but I can't take you to my retreat, for it's half a mile away, and the road is very bad.”

Janet's “retreat” was at the other side of the island, — a desolate, rock-bound strip of coast, where the ocean was always unquiet, and she could sit and watch the breakers, and study old Whitehead, who reared his imposing front at a little distance.

She sat there one day while Mr. Phenix and Mr. Kyte had gone mackerel-fishing, and Brenda and Mrs. Loring were chatting together at the cottage. Mr. Phenix had called her “Janet,” and she was disquieted again.

“I will not permit it ; I will not permit it,” said she, gazing with fixed determination at the sea ; but the sea looked grandly unconcerned. The waves came and went, came and went, beating in a constant rhythm against the shore ; and in watching them she soon forgot Mr. Phenix.

“Hear those solemn breakers, as regular as the pulse of life ! The sea is dreadful ; but it holds me with a spell, and I cannot turn my eyes away. I wish Tim were here to look at it with me, for I know how he loves it. Cousin Brenda thought the other day he might come ;

and I laughed at her, for I knew well enough that what he said of coming was only a passing thought. Still, there never was a time, since I can remember, that I needed Tim as I do now. He would know just how to manage Mr. Phenix; for he understands young men, being rather oldish himself, — let's see, twenty-seven. Hark! there's a steamboat-whistle. I must have been idling here a good while."

Still she lingered. There was no haste, and it was clearly her moral duty to have another plain talk with herself about Mr. Phenix. When at last she arose from her rocky couch, and bent her steps homeward, as much in the dark as ever concerning Mr. Phenix, the figure of a man was to be seen coming toward her. She gazed an instant curiously; then, struck by something familiar in the broad shoulders and the swinging gait, exclaimed, though nobody could hear her, —

"Why, Tim! Tim, is that you? Did I bring you by wishing?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON THE ROCKS.

“O TIM! I didn’t expect you: I certainly didn’t! But I’ve been thinking of you half the afternoon, — isn’t it strange? — and wishing and hoping you’d come!”

“Then it’s an instance of instinctive obedience; for I didn’t know you wanted me to come,” replied Mr. Braxton, smiling with pleasure at her eagerness. It seemed to him that she had grown a little taller within the past few months; she was certainly more rounded in outline, and her face had gained in piquancy: altogether he had never seen her so charming.

“You must have been in the boat that landed just now. And how did you know where to look for me?”

“I’ve just come from the cottage. Judge Davenport and Mrs. Whippowill started with me this morning from Quinnebasset.”

“Oh, the dear old judge! And of course Mrs. Whippowill would come if he did. But the sea-fog will prove a discipline, by taking the crimps out of her hair. Now sit down here on the rocks, and talk: I want to have you a little while all to myself.”

There was surely no lack in Janet’s welcome; but Mr. Braxton seemed hardly satisfied, for he watched

her stealthily from under the ambush of his eyebrows, as if ready to seize her inmost thoughts off guard.

Was she happier than she had been in Brooklyn? Yes: there was a light in her eye, a joy in her tones, that had been wanting at home. Was it owing to the relief of breaking loose from her father? Or was there a deeper cause? This he did not know: this was what he meant to find out. Most people's eyes are like stained glass, so little do they reveal; but Janet's eyes gave a glimpse of the soul that lay beyond them. She had not yet learned the woman's art of hiding her thoughts; and Tim knew, or fancied he knew, that he could read a story in a glance, if he would only lead her on to talk of Mr. Phenix. Yet for this very reason he hesitated, and deferred the test.

"You say mamma seems pretty well, Tim?"

"Did I? I hardly meant that. She is not strong, and I know feels a little dull without you," returned Mr. Braxton, aware that he concealed part of the truth.

"And Papa Vail grows more amiable?"

"Ah! where did you obtain your information?"

"You know I always prophesied that he would."

"Which doesn't make it true, Janey!"

"Well, at any rate he can't have grown worse," said she, with easy faith, and hastened to something else.

"Now tell me, did you receive my last letter?"

"Written when?"

"Why, last week: in answer to the one you wrote cousin Brenda."

"No."

"Why, Timothy Braxton, you're astonishingly cool! Here I've been writing you every week; and you never

hear from me, you say. I begin to think somebody steals your mail ! ”

Tim laughed, not very pleasantly.

“ I begin to think that same thing myself, Janey. ‘ Some circumstantial evidence is very strong, as where you find a trout in the milk ; ’ and I had been growing for a good while so suspicious, that last week I had my letter-box watched. ”

“ Dear me ! did it do any good ? ”

“ Yes, the thief was discovered. ”

“ Oh the wretch ! the horrible creature ! And of course you’ll have him tried, and sent to state-prison, as he deserves. ”

Of course Mr. Braxton would do nothing of the kind. Whether Rufus Vail was in his “ rascally right mind ” or not, he was Harriet Braxton’s husband ; and Tim had merely let him alone, and procured another box for himself, with a different key, which he meant not to lose.

“ You *will* send him to state-prison ? ”

“ The matter isn’t settled yet, ” replied Tim evasively.

There was no valid reason why he should not have disclosed the whole facts to Janet : but he was constitutionally averse to talking on disagreeable subjects, and this one was particularly stale and unprofitable ; he had not found it safe to let his thoughts dwell on it very much. Besides, what good would it do to imbitter Janet still more against her father ?

“ If you’ve written every week, Janey, that would make — let us see — sixteen letters ; and I’ve received just four. ”

“Yes, Tim ; and you didn’t seem to believe my word about it, and that has grieved me more than a little.”

“I humbly beg your pardon, but I probably missed the very letters in which you defended yourself. So I’ve felt aggrieved too, Janey. I dare say I shouldn’t have thought of coming now if this hadn’t occurred ; but even after it was all cleared up I found myself still very much drawn toward Maine. I wanted to see for myself exactly how matters are going with you — yes, and report to your mother ; that was one object,” said Mr. Braxton disinterestedly. “And I felt anxious about cousin Brenda,” he added, as an after-thought.

“Oh ! cousin Brenda only needs rest,” said Janet.

“I wish I could take care of her, Janey : I’ve struck a vein lately, and feel encouraged.”

“I knew you would some time, I knew you would, Tim,” cried Janet joyfully. “I always said I should live to see you a rich man.”

“Hm ! I never expect or desire to be rich ; it’s an unworthy ambition : but I do want to be as good an architect as there is in New York, and have a modest competence, so I sha’n’t be obliged to waste my thoughts on vulgar money. Janey, I’d rather die this minute, and be eaten by fishes, than own all your father’s gold at the price he has paid.”

“I hope so,” said Janet with energy : “I’d throw you into the ocean myself before I’d let you become like father.”

And then she plied him with a thousand questions concerning the Vail family in all its branches ; her young friends in Brooklyn ; and the little brother who had lived and died in Portland ; even Jack Flint, Tim’s

theatrical friend whom she did not know. And had Mr. Madison Tukey made his peace with Mr. Vail? She should always carry a picture in her mind, of that man wearing a circular cloak, and riding away from Quinnebasset in a mud-wagon.

"But you've told me nothing about yourself, and how you are enjoying it here," said Tim, when the young catechist came to a pause.

"Oh! vastly, though I don't like the sea," said she with a shudder.

They saw before them only the wind-swept ocean, a yacht, and a dory with two fishermen in it; that was all except the olive-green and brownish-gray seaweed, which lay drying on the rocks, ready to be taken back again like an Indian gift by the hungry sea. It was a bold shore, — rocky points cutting into the ocean, tiny islands rising out of it, and creamy waves dashing over them on their way to strike the shore in lines of foam.

"Grand!" murmured Tim.

"Yes, I know it is grand," said Janet: "but it seems to me like a howling wilderness, wild and treacherous and dark; or like a maniac beating his head against a stone wall; no, like an angry man brooding over an injury, and casting up bitter thoughts. And oh, that ceaseless, mournful wail!"

"So you dislike the sea, yet enjoy it here vastly?" said Tim with a penetrating look. "Slightly inconsistent, unless you've brought such agreeable company with you that the evils are counterbalanced."

"Oh! I like to see cousin Brenda having a good time, — though, as for that, she'd be happy on the top of a pyramid, — and then we do have agreeable com-

pany: Mrs. Loring is charming, and Mr. Kyte and Mr. Phenix are very pleasant," returned Janet, averting her head to pluck a primrose growing shyly behind a rock.

"Mr. Phenix, I think, is the gentleman you once supposed to be your brother. Was it a great disappointment when you learned your mistake?"

"O Tim, I was so foolish about that! Why, it seems ages ago! I had but one idea, — to find Harry, for there was nobody else that belonged to me. Yes, I was disappointed at the time."

"I hardly saw Mr. Phenix last spring," pursued Tim, pulling up some grass by the roots with considerable force: "he isn't much like that schoolmaster, Mr. Teague, if I remember."

"Not in the least. Mr. Teague is always talking politics and specie basis. The judge admires him. But how did you happen to think of these young men?"

"Why, I'm naturally interested in your acquaintances, Janet. I knew them all when you were at home, and I'd like to know them all now. You don't fancy I lose my interest in you because you happen to be out of my sight?"

"No, oh, no! that couldn't make the least difference with either of us. I have had little uncomfortable suspicions about you, Tim; but I'll throw them all away, and think of you just as I did when you were my boy-uncle. You never will change."

"Thank you," said Mr. Braxton, wincing slightly. "And to return to Mr. Phenix. He has been very cordial and polite, has he not? In the four letters I have had from you, he has figured largely."

Janet's eyes fell.

"Do you see that butterfly kissing the rod?" said she, "that golden-rod close beside you. Yes, Mr. Phenix is polite to everybody; and when I tried to find my brother he pitied me, and was particularly kind. You must make his acquaintance now. He and Mr. Kyte will be delighted to take you with them mackerel-fishing, and they can find you a hammock to sleep in if you choose: they sleep in hammocks. Oh, I hope you'll stay as long as we do!"

"Will you go home with me if I do?"

"Why, Timothy Braxton, do you think I've become a patient Griselda all of a sudden? You've held her up to me for a pattern till I should think your arms would ache; but I assure you I always considered patient Griselda a fool."

"Don't remember ever mentioning the lady's name to you," laughed Tim.

"Well, but you want me to go back and submit to father's tyranny."

"No, on the whole, I do not," he replied.

"Then, how long will you stay?"

"Three days."

"O Tim!"

"Can't spare any more time. But I think we were talking of Mr. Phenix. I expect to be captivated with him. I remember you told me he has fine manners, and is 'tall and graceful, with the handsomest hands, and such lovely eyes!'"

"Yes," said Janet stoutly, "he *has* good manners. He doesn't treasure up your little foolish speeches, and spring them upon you six months afterward."

Tim laughed, and rubbed his hands. It was delightfully natural to hear that impassioned retort, and perhaps he had teased Janet for the very purpose of calling it forth. Still, not one glimpse yet of her eyes. In regard to her relationship with Mr. Phenix, he was not one grain wiser. His close questioning might have embarrassed her; or was there some subtler reason why she dropped her eyes at mention of the young man's name? Tim was not inclined to hasty judgments: he would wait, and observe for himself, before he made up his mind.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A STOLEN SECRET.

“YOUR mother sent this to you, Janey: does it look familiar?” said Mr. Braxton, appearing in the sitting-room after tea, armed with a large tubular-shaped package.

“Oh, my music!” She seized upon it eagerly. “Where did mamma find so much of it? It was scattered to the four winds.”

“That girl loves the very sight of music, the mere printed notes,” said Miss Harlow indulgently. “Why, they look to me like crooked men climbing a fence,” she added, as she went on chasing flies in her eager, breathless, excited way, which would have been absurd in a larger woman, but like every thing Brenda Harlow did was very entertaining; at least, so thought Judge Davenport who was looking on from the veranda.

“How can she live here without putting in screens?” said Mrs. Whippowill very sweetly, in a tone meant only for the judge’s ear.

Mr. Phenix went to the what-not to see if his flute was in place.

“We are all much indebted to you, Mr. Braxton, for bringing Janet’s music,” said he deferentially.

Perhaps the word “Janet” escaped his lips by inad-

vertence, but more probably he liked Mr. Braxton to hear him say it.

Tim observed a little later, when all except Mrs. Loring set off for a walk to the other side of the island to see the moon rise, that Mr. Phenix took his place beside Janet quite as a matter of course. But this she would not permit. She moved forward, and joined Tim, probably out of courtesy to him as a guest, Brenda being appropriated by the judge; for here, as at Quinnebasset, the boarders kept up the habit of walking in pairs. Mr. Phenix went now with the pensive Mrs. Whippowill, but was very observant of Mr. Braxton, who had never seemed to him like "much of an uncle."

Mr. Kyte, the superfluous gentleman, drifted amiably about upon the outside, and consoled himself by admiring Mrs. Whippowill, whose "steps were sentiments." The way was rough, and Brenda and the judge naturally fell behind to such a distance that even the strained ear of Mrs. Whippowill could not catch a word of their conversation.

"What, at our time of life! My dear friend, how can you?" exclaimed Miss Harlow in answer to something the judge had been saying. "I ought to thank you, and I do thank you; but it grieves me, for all that. I thought you knew, I thought everybody knew, that my fate was fixed long ago."

She alluded to a sad bereavement of her youth, but the judge was not to be intimidated by the ghost of a dead lover. He pressed her to give a stronger reason for rejecting his suit, a less sentimental one; in short, a reason that would "stand in court." So there was

“more said on both sides ;” and poor Brenda, who had the highest regard and respect for her old friend, was cut to the heart because it was impossible to avoid making him unhappy. With all her airiness and pliancy of manner, she was subject to fixed ideas, one of them being that “marriage was not her vocation :” nevertheless it would go hard with her if this plain talk should be the means of alienating the good judge’s friendship.

Arrived at “the other side” of the island, Janet’s “retreat,” they all seated themselves on the rocks, and watched the full moon rise out of the ocean, and sail grandly upward, leaving the waves palpitating with a thousand points of light.

“Oh ! I could sit here forever,” murmured the susceptible Mrs. Whippowill, as Brenda arose and left her beside Judge Davenport.

The others were ascending the slope to get a better view of an excrescence of land elegantly termed “Pumpkin Knob.”

“O ladies !” said Mr. Kyte ecstatically, “I wish you could see how the moonlight enhances your beauty : I do, now, really.”

“Yes, Janet, your hair glitters like a crown of stars,” suggested Mr. Phenix, calling together all the scattered rays of his affection, and beaming down upon her tropically.

Mr. Braxton frowned. The astronomical comparison was not bad, and he found no fault with the moonbeams ; but the eyebeams gave him a cold shiver.

“Come, Tim,” said Brenda, linking her arm in his ; “come, Janet,” and walked them away to a little distance beyond the sound of this irksome chatter.

They stood a long while, gazing without a word at the advancing and retreating waves, while Janet thought how glad she was to be shut off from the world once more with these two "friends in council." She recalled what Mr. Phenix had lately said of "learning to love another," and smiled at the absurdity of his supposing she could ever care for him as she cared for these two dear beings, whose steadfast affection had been her earthly anchor all her days.

"Well, Janey," said Tim, drawing her arm closer within his, "what are the wild waves saying?"

"They are talking to me of you and Brenda," returned Janet, taking the hand of each in turn and pressing it to her cheek. "They say how comfortable it is to feel that the staple is still strong, and the cable well fastened to it, and that I needn't be afraid of your drifting away. What are the wild waves saying to you, Tim?"

"Something quite the reverse, Janey, quite the reverse. They say, 'What if the staple is weakening, what if the cable is loosening, what if the vessel is going to part from its moorings?'"

"What vessel?" said Janet faintly.

Did he allude to Mr. Phenix? She must talk with him to-morrow, and explain all these false appearances, that is, if she could summon the courage. How often she had longed for his advice during the past week or so! And he would be willing to give it: he was not over-scrupulous like Brenda.

"Well, Brenda, have you no suggestions to make?" asked Tim, as his cousin remained silent. "Suppose you tell us what the breakers are saying to *you*?"

She did not answer for a moment.

“They speak in a consoling tone, Tim. They say, ‘This also will pass away, — this also will pass away.’”

The words ended in an involuntary little sob; and Brenda, surprised and humiliated, drew off a little from Tim, and covered her face with both hands, leaving him to wonder what could have happened to ruffle her perennially bright spirits. Or was she suffering merely from nervous depression? Poor woman, she was doubtless more broken in health than he had supposed! But she soon rallied, and exclaimed with an artificial little cough, —

“Now, Tim, don’t fancy I’m low in my mind: it isn’t that, but I’ve been cold ever since we went in bathing this afternoon; for you see, Janet and those other selfish creatures always send me in ahead to take the chill off the water.”

“Oh! they do, do they?” said Tim, laughing heartily at this new and exquisitely absurd method of warming the Atlantic. “Why don’t they send in somebody nearer their own size?” catching up this small and much-abused heating-apparatus, and whirling her around like a top.

And so the little tearful episode was forgotten, as Brenda had meant it should be. By this time Mr. Phenix was at Janet’s side; and the rest of the party were coming up, for Mrs. Whippowill’s “forever” on the rocks had expired the moment the judge cruelly left her alone. Janet looked around for Tim, and saw him at a little distance apparently engaged in taking a mental photograph of Mr. Phenix.

“He is reading him through from preface to appendix, and he won’t find much there,” thought she, drawing away with a feeling of annoyance, as her elegant escort adjusted her shawl.

She did not wish Tim to think she liked to have Mr. Phenix hovering about her. Tim was very severe against flirting. She had agonized for a week lest she might have done wrong; but remorse was thrown in the background now, and all she cared for was that Tim should not think ill of her.

But Mr. Braxton’s thoughts were not of blame. He was merely bent on reading the facts before him just as they stood. He might have called in cousin Brenda as an interpreter, but she was too proud and reticent for that. Who and what was Mr. Phenix? Why did the whole party regard him as Janet’s acknowledged lover? Did she, or did she not, encourage his marked attentions?

“What does a girl like Janet know of young men? But I can’t believe it yet. If there were enough of him I could bear it better,” groaned he inwardly. “His eyes have a smiling, shallow look, with no thought in them, and precious little feeling, — or that’s the way I read them. A young man need not have money; it is not absolutely necessary he should have brains: but there is one thing he must have, and that is character.”

Here Mr. Phenix adjusted Janet’s shawl for the third time, with a glance of ineffable sweetness which threw Tim out of all patience.

“A worse butterfly than Mr. Kyte! If I were going to make love to a young lady I would not do it in

public. He is softer than is at all necessary ; but probe him to a certain depth, and you strike the hard pan of selfishness. Or that's the way I read him," corrected Mr. Braxton again, striving to be just. "What does he really care for Janey? He wouldn't sacrifice one iota of his ease and comfort for her sake ; he cares for nobody but himself : and if Janey *should* be drawn toward him — No, no, Heaven forbid !"

Here he turned about, and ground his heel into the earth.

When they returned to the cottage, and found Mrs. Loring waiting for them on the veranda, they assured her it had been a "delightful evening ;" as in truth it had been, so far as brilliant moonlight went, and soft skies, and a band of music in a lighted boat upon the sea : yet every one of that apparently gay little party had found it, for personal reasons, a trying evening, and nobody but Mr. Phenix was destined to a night of quiet sleep. Brenda lay after she was in bed, gazing out toward Diamond Island, as if seeking to penetrate the sapphire sky beyond it. Mrs. Whippowill called Janet into her room, ostensibly to point out to her a distant cottage, gay with Chinese lanterns, but really to ask her if she had noticed how oddly the judge and Miss Harlow appeared.

As Janet promptly and rather curtly replied that she had perceived nothing unusual, Mrs. Whippowill looked relieved, and was able to take pleasure in sundry rockets which were shooting upward from some unknown region, and veering sidewise, blown by a fitful breeze.

"Oh ! you're not sleepy either," said Janet, going

back to Brenda. "Then perhaps you'll let me sit up a while and tranquillize my mind."

She needed a little solace; for Tim's searching eyes had haunted her all the evening, and she was still restless, with an ill-defined feeling of discomfort. She seated herself before the little old-fashioned stand, turned up the wick of the kerosene lamp, and, with a loving touch, opened the roll of music her mother had sent.

It was an innocent-looking parcel; yet if Janet had had foreknowledge of what lurked within it, as "in shady leaves of destiny," she might have paused before she so much as laid a finger on the fateful thing. It was the last way in the world to "tranquillize her mind."

As she spread out the sheets one by one, and her practised eye ran over the familiar notes, she hummed the tunes just above her breath, fancying she could hear the accompaniment of her dear old piano and Tim's violin, and thinking how she should enjoy playing this and that favorite air in Quinnebasset by and by. Then she pitied Brenda for having no music in her soul; considered it as pathetic as the lack of speech in dumb animals, and was glad such deprived people could never know how much they miss.

While pursuing this train of thought, and slowly turning the leaves, she came upon a sheet of note-paper, filled on two sides with Tim's well-known, back-handed writing, and addressed, "Dearest Janey." It was a common thing to fall in with Tim's careless autographs scattered about in the most unlikely places.

"Something he began long ago, and never finished,

I suppose. It's a marvel how he gets any of his letters into the office."

She glanced at it quite unconcernedly, only wondering when the note was written, and how it came there. But presently a change passed over her face. *This* was not like Tim; not like any thing he ever wrote or said, or that she had ever dreamed of his writing or saying. Was she to be always stumbling upon surprises? She had begun the last year of her life with a morsel of bitter knowledge: was there more fruit on the same tree?

"My precious Janey," [ran the note, hastily scrawled in pencil] "did you ever hear of the Jumblies?"

'They went to sea in a sieve, they did,—
In a sieve they went to sea:
In spite of all their friends could say,
On a winter's morn, on a stormy day,
In a sieve they went to sea.'

"And do you know, that I, being akin to the Jumblies, and as great a fool as any of them, was on the very point, night before last, of asking you to embark with me for life in just such a sieve?"

'With only a beautiful pea-green veil,
Tied with a ribbon, by way of a sail,
To a small, tobacco-pipe mast.'

"But, thank Heaven, I guarded my tongue. I'm not so lost yet to reason and honor as to suggest such a madcap voyage to a little girl who has always sailed on summer seas. I would never forgive another man in my place for doing it, and I will not be such a drivelling idiot as to do it myself. I am perfectly well aware that for years to come poverty is to be my portion, and with God's help I will bear it alone. If you really cared for me, there is nothing I would not dare, for then it would be for your sake as well as my own; but the love that does not rise spontaneously I will not seek to win. I have

never allowed you to suspect my feeling for you. It would amaze you, child, if you could by any possibility understand it! There are depths upon depths, down even to the everlasting springs of my life, and in the deepest of all lies your image. It can never be effaced: it is as fixed as Truth at the bottom of a well. You will see at once that this is a miserable state of things, but you are only a child; you know nothing of what hearts can hold and hide away, and I am debating whether to tell you. I certainly shall not tell you if" —

Here this extraordinary document broke off in the middle of a sentence.

Janet rose, and stood bewildered, almost as she had stood after reading that strange letter from her mother. What! Tim?—Uncle Tim? She had never dreamed of this—never! And he had taken a strange way to tell her! No: he had not meant that she should ever see the letter. He had scribbled it at some odd moment, probably while at his own home; and instead of burning it, as he intended, had thoughtlessly left it in a sheet of music. That was just like him: he was always scattering bits of writing broadcast. But what a revelation! The whole world was changed again to Janet. Tim her lover? Why, it was impossible! But stay! when was this letter written?—this wondrous letter, which made her heart throb and her brain whirl. There was no more clew to its date than to the date of the Indian arrow-head which Mr. Kyte so proudly dug up yesterday, near an old well-sweep. Was it written last year, just after his return from Quinnebasset? Was "night before last" the night he and Brenda and Janet had sat up and talked so long?

"No: it must have been years ago, for he speaks of me as a child. And the letter was in that old sheet

of music that I haven't looked at for years, — 'The Blue Violet's Lament.' Yes, he wrote it ages ago, and meant then what he said; but of course it's all over now."

She read the note again, and her eyes moistened.

"Dear Tim! to think he should have cared for me in that beautiful way, and I never knew it! How could he help letting me know? He is governed by principle, and has reasons for every thing; but it couldn't have been his poverty, — that's too absurd! No: but I was Papa Vail's daughter then; and to influence me, and steal me away from my father, would have been dishonorable. I *think* that was Tim's reason. But now that I have left home — It would not be wrong now; that is, if he still cared. He does not care: the feeling is over. He thought it would last, but it did not."

Janet rested her cheek upon her hand, and fell into a miz-maze. There was great fascination and novelty in imagining what might have happened if it *had* lasted; and, singularly enough, the image of Mr. H. Peabody Phenix did not interfere in the least with these musings. She thought of him once or twice; but he belonged in a different sphere from Tim, and she quite forgot him again.

When had Tim begun to think of her in that "beautiful way"? And when had he begun to leave off thinking? For of course there had been a rise and progress, and then a gradual fall and decline. In truth, she was not so sure of the decline, for it was not like him to be fickle: but she kept saying to herself that she was sure; that she knew he had changed.

Well, it was a very interesting problem ; but she could not, and evidently Tim would not, solve it.

“ This that I know, I ought never to have known : it is a stolen secret, and I’m guilty every moment for holding it. How can I drop it out of my mind ? How can I meet him again ? But I must, and I must treat him as usual too. Though it can never be quite the same between us ; and I shall always feel guilty, and wish I had not seen the letter.”

She laid it carefully in her own bureau-drawer between a satin bag of sachet-powder and a pile of handkerchiefs, and said she would forget it ; but it was as eloquent there as it had been before. The truth was, she already knew it by heart.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A MISUNDERSTANDING.

JANET awoke early next morning, and stole into the sitting-room, leaving Miss Harlow still asleep. The crimson sun was just rising out of the sea, and the whole sky stood waiting, flushed from east to west with foregleams of the coming glory.

“I’m going to think of Tim just as I did yesterday: why not?” said she, standing at the window, and gazing blankly at the glittering harbor. “This thing that is so new to me is old to him; in fact, it’s dead and buried, and I suppose its ghost doesn’t even ‘walk.’ I’ve been prowling about and unearthing something I’ve no more right to than I have to Capt. Kidd’s money, which people dig for all along the Atlantic coast.

“And now I’ve found this hidden treasure: what’s it good for? It’s like fairy gold, that turns to dry leaves if you hold it in your hand. Ah, well! thieves are always punished; and I wish, oh! how I wish, I could throw this thing away!”

She made a waving gesture with both hands. “There, it’s gone now!” Gone! it went no farther than her breath. Alas! it is hard to fight against the “principalities of the air.” And, to make the warfare

more difficult, Tim himself appeared, and, instead of looking precisely "the same" that he had looked yesterday, had undergone some subtle, indefinable change. What it was, Janet could not have told, or whether it was in the man himself or only in the eyes that looked at him: still she felt intuitively that the change was for all time. He might not know it, she must take good care that he should not know it; but he would never be to her again the same Tim he had always been before.

"Good-morning, Janey," said he in cordial, unrestrained tones, coming forward to shake hands as if nothing had happened. And, indeed, what had happened? Nothing at all.

"I didn't expect to find anybody up; but Mrs. Loring said you never locked the doors, so I came to look for some postal-cards I wrote last night. Seen any thing of them?"

Janet promptly produced and presented the cards, with her finger on her lip.

It seemed very natural to be taking care of Tim's property; but as she looked at him timidly, she thought what beautiful eyes he had, though surely that was nothing new. And his heavy eyebrows and long lashes gave them a darker shade than they really owned. They were, in fact, a violet-blue like Brenda's, and not brown like Mrs. Vail's. No one could say that Tim's mouth was exactly beautiful, neither was his nose artistically cut; his hands were not models, though well shaped, well kept, and wearing a look of capability and strength. His shoulders were rather too square, and his neck too short; he was much taller

and larger than Mr. Phenix, and not nearly so handsome: but Janet had always averred that she did not like handsome men.

"We shall have time for a walk before breakfast," whispered Tim.

"Yes," returned she, without looking away from the window. "And afterwards Mr. Kyte and Mr. Phenix will take us sailing in their yacht."

"*Nolens volens?*" asked Tim rather tartly.

"Oh, I thought you would like it! Isn't this a fine view?" said Janet, forgetting to go for her hat. "Don't you think Diamond and Little Diamond Island are gems? They say that long rope of sand between them is submerged at times by the tide, but I haven't seen it. Mr. Phenix sailed up the harbor last October when both those islands were skirted with bayberry bushes of the finest crimson, and the rocks were covered with lichens of the most brilliant colors; and he says he never saw any thing so exquisitely lovely."

"Who was it that sailed?" asked Tim, on whom this description had been apparently lost. "When was it, did you say?"

And in turning quickly, he hit by accident the block of wood which held up the window, thereby causing the sash to drop explosively.

"There, I've waked up the whole house and the two hammocks, owing to the fatal name of Phenix! Perhaps you are not aware, Janey, how that name has haunted me from the first hearing. I wish I had brought those letters, just to show you how much you had to say about him."

It did seem too bad of Mr. Braxton to keep bring-

ing her face to face in this way with her own foolishness. Hadn't other girls had transient fancies, and outgrown them, and been forgiven? If Tim was determined to tease her, she could not confide in him as she had wished and intended. "Did I write about Mr. Phenix? Well, he was kind to me," said Janet, looking with preternatural innocence at the jelly-fish in the glass jar; but the betraying color rose to her cheeks, and Tim noted it.

"Will you walk?" said he. "We can talk better out of doors."

They went forth together, and she took him across a private path which was mainly a stretch of brown grass worn slippery with the tread of tourists' feet. It led by the dwellings of old residents, — red-roofed cottages, some of them, whose door-yards had rickety fences, and were overrun with riotous lilac-bushes and gnarled apple-trees, and very much bespattered with "butter-and-eggs." It led past old-fashioned, right-angled well-sweeps, moss-gathering stone walls, and clumps of evergreen; past gardens blazing with holly-hocks, poppies, scarlet climbing beans, and red lilies which thrust their hot faces through the chinks of picket-fences for a breath from the sea.

"Isn't it quaint?" said Janet with enthusiasm.

"Very," replied Mr. Braxton with indifference.

They came upon three boys, all shouldering heavy masses of cat-tails, while an exultant little dog trotted on in advance to announce to the waiting world that they were coming.

"And the tinkling of those distant cow-bells: did you ever hear any thing like it?"

Tim cleared his throat for the speech which for the past sixteen hours he had been pre-determined to make ; but he approached it gradually.

“ You haven’t told me much about your classes yet, Janey. ”

“ Oh ! they’re tiny ones, with a tiny income ; but Mr. Teague is helping to raise a class for me in Poonoosac. ”

“ Mr. Teague ? ” Tim repeated the name as if he found it refreshing.

“ And the money I brought from Brooklyn I’ve put in the bank. Cousin Brenda calls me a poor heiress. ”

“ Indeed ! There’s Scotch thrift ! ”

“ No : cousin Brenda made me do it. If it hadn’t been for her I should have given it all away, or half of it, to a man who told a pitiful story about — well, you won’t care to hear : it was all a lie. Cousin Brenda thinks I’m easily duped. ”

Tim smiled, for Janet’s credulity had always been one of her marked traits.

“ And you are happy ? I can see that. ”

“ Oh, very ! I always told you it would be heaven to me not to be scolded. ”

“ That is not all your ground for happiness, Janey ? You have made some fast friends in Quinnebasset ? ”

“ Indeed I have, and I want to tell you a great deal about them. There’s Judge Davenport, to begin with, the most genial old man ! He calls me his ‘ little girl ; and I think I feel toward him almost as if he were my own father, because he takes such a warm interest in me. We have long chats together, and he talks to me by the hour about cousin Brenda. He seems to have the highest opinion of Brenda. ”

“Yes, that is apparent.”

“Oh! I mean as a friend. You mustn’t see too much, Tim. I know you are very observing, but I’m sure Judge Davenport doesn’t think of any thing but being a ‘power for good,’ and ‘lending a hand;’ he lives only to help people: and then he has been married once, and that is quite enough. Now I’d like to know, Tim, *was* cousin Brenda engaged once, ages ago? and did the young man die?”

“Yes.”

“I thought so. I don’t know why, but I always thought so.”

“And his name was Charles Harrington.”

“He didn’t belong to *my* Harringtons?”

“Yes: he was your mother’s brother.”

It took Janet some time to adjust herself to this new phase of affairs. So cousin Brenda had narrowly escaped becoming her aunt! Had this fact had any connection with the loving kindness she had always lavished on Charles Harrington’s niece? At any rate, the niece would now feel a warmer affection than ever for the woman who had once loved her uncle.

“It must have been very hard for her; but she lived through it, and here she is to-day the happiest woman I know. Still she thinks love is immortal,” said Janet reflectively; adding to herself, “but it can’t have been so in Tim’s case.”

“For years afterward she seemed to live only for her brother Edward, and then when he died she was left alone in the world: still, as you say, she is the happiest woman I know,” remarked Tim, coming to a full stop, as if he had disposed of the subject; while

Janet, on the contrary, continued to review it in her mind, along with another romance quite as novel and still more personal to herself, till she seemed to walk in a dream, and Mr. Braxton's next remark fell on her ear perfectly innocent of all meaning.

"And now, Janey," he was saying with some appearance of effort, "are you willing to talk with me freely and frankly as you used to do before we left home?"

He was obliged to repeat the question.

"Oh, certainly! why not? Haven't I always talked frankly, Tim? As if I had changed!"

"Well, but you may think I'm presuming a little now: this is different. I don't want to force your confidence, Janey."

He spoke in a slow, hesitating tone, which would have placed her at once on the alert if her attention had not been divided and subdivided by their previous talk.

"Go on, Tim: I am listening."

"Well, in the first place, it was a surprise to me to find you at the islands. I expected — that is, hoped — to find you just where I had left you, literally and metaphorically. You understand me, Janey? I had no suspicion of this — this new" — He looked at the horizon for a word, and added, "new arrangement."

He would not say "engagement." He did not for a moment believe it was any thing of the sort. He meant "this new arrangement of setting you off on one side with Mr. Phenix;" but unfortunately he left the young man's name out of the sentence as quite superfluous. She must know he was thinking of Mr. Phenix: of whom else could he be thinking?



"They had contrived in a short space of time to reach a remarkably foolish misunderstanding." — PAGE 243.

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"I beg your pardon," said Janet, looking mystified.

"Why, I refer to the arrangement the boarders seem to have made for you, Janey. I want to know if it pleases *you*. How do *you* like it?"

What Tim meant was perfectly clear to himself, and he supposed it must be equally clear to her. He had in general sufficient command of the English language to make himself understood, but he had utterly failed now. She thought he referred to the new arrangement of rustivating at the islands.

"Did you fancy I wasn't pleased and content, Tim? What made you? You must think I'm an ungrateful girl—deceitful too." She spoke with alacrity, suspecting he was leading the conversation toward Mr. Phenix,—a subject she dreaded, and wished to postpone a while. "It's dear and good of you, Tim, to be so interested about me; but, indeed and indeed, I'm very happy. I've often thought this was the happiest summer of my life."

Her words sounded in clear, ringing tones, conveying an impression she never dreamed of. Tim listened gravely.

For two young people, not suspected of any bias toward idiocy, they had contrived in a short space of time to reach a remarkably foolish misunderstanding.

"Did you say the happiest summer of your life?" repeated the first dullard slowly, as if to confirm himself in his own mistake.

"Indeed it is, and oughtn't it to be?" replied the second dullard, wondering why he did not seem pleased.

They walked on in profound silence.

"O Tim, the sky is so wonderful! Do look!"

said Janet presently, her spirits appearing to rise as his sank. But he showed a stolid indifference to the sky, not even turning his head to look at it; and there fell another significant pause.

He considered that he had asked Janet a plain question, and that she had answered it: and he was not prepared for such an answer; he had supposed he knew the girl better.

And Janet was thinking, —

“I’m better prepared now, and he may go on to speak of Mr. Phenix. If he won’t tease, I shall be glad to ask his advice; for Tim always was famous for helping people over hard places.”

But to her surprise he did not once allude to Mr. Phenix. There were many things he had intended to say, — words of counsel and warning, appeals to her excellent common-sense, — but it was too late now: the die was cast; she was decided and satisfied and happy. He could not talk on the subject, and he would not listen: he had heard enough.

“Suppose we go back to the cottage?” said he with a curious, sharp discontent in his voice.

“Yes, we must go this minute: I forgot that Mrs. Loring isn’t well, and I was to help cousin Brenda about the breakfast. Why, here comes Mr. Phenix looking for us!”

Tim slipped quietly away, and from that moment there was something in his demeanor that quite baffled Janet’s penetration.

When she met him again it was at breakfast, — a wretched meal prepared by the novices, Miss Harlow and Miss Keith, assisted by the still more densely igno-

rant Mr. Kyte. If coffee-berries could be supposed to possess any self-respect, they would sooner blight in the stem than survive to disgrace themselves as they did that morning. Mrs. Whippowill stirred the mud in her cup with a self-complacent smile, rejoicing that Brenda Harlow was responsible for the grounds, and that the judge knew it.

The judge looked grave enough, and everybody else a little dull except Mr. Braxton. There was certainly no accounting for his very uneven spirits. But Janet had settled one point: the more she thought of that singular letter, — and she thought of it constantly, — the more she was convinced that “he wrote it two or three years ago, and then forgot all about it next day.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

A PLUNGE.

TIM sat up that night at the hotel, and wrote "Ich-abod" on every blank bit of paper at hand. I feel bound to mention this, as it was the only outward and visible sign he gave of the civil war within his breast.

Mrs. Whippowill did remark in one of her confidential asides to Mr. Kyte, that he "looked to her like a moody man;" and Brenda, knowing him well, thought his laugh seemed forced: but he entered with apparent zest into a family yachting-cruise, swam like a South Sea Islander, joined the judge in story-telling at tea-time, and after it had a word-tilt with Miss Harlow; in fine, conducted himself like a person of well-balanced mind, who fully enjoys Bohemian life at the islands.

Miss Harlow "felt it on her conscience" to have a plain talk with him regarding Janet, whose little episode with Mr. Phenix she was afraid he took too seriously; but she had only a moment with him in private, and that moment he devoted to affectionate inquiries about her health, begging her "not to exhaust her life in the effort to sustain it, but to break away from her professional engagements, and go to live, for good and all, with him and aunt Rossy."

Janet also tried all day to get speech with Tim, but in vain. Mr. Phenix grew more and more adhesive, now that there was a rival in the field; and, whenever she succeeded in shaking him off, some fatality instantly occurred to prevent a meeting with Mr. Braxton.

“Oh, well! I’ll see him to-morrow: something is wrong, but I’ll set it all right. Is it possible he blames and despises me on account of this miserable Mr. Phenix, when he must see how the man annoys me, and how I’m trying to freeze him to death?”

“But he may think I’ve been foolish in the past, or affairs couldn’t have reached this state. Tim is hard toward evil-doers: I remember what Brenda says about his inexorable chin. Oh, well! I’ll see him to-morrow, and set it all right,” she repeated.

But Mr. Braxton announced next morning, very cheerfully, that he must take the first boat for the city, in order to reach the New-York train.

“You can’t mean it!” exclaimed Janet with amazement and chagrin: “you said you’d stay three days.”

“Well, this is three days from home, and more; for you see I have to count the time spent on the road,” replied Mr. Braxton; and cousin Brenda, carefully as she watched him, could not be certain whether this was an after-thought of his, or whether he had really finished his visit. In either case urging was useless. As well talk to old rock-bound Whitehead as to Timothy Braxton, when his face was set toward a certain point.

Day before yesterday Janet would have expressed freely the grief and disappointment she felt at letting him go; but now, like Mother Eve, and every other

mortal who has tasted forbidden fruit, she was oppressed by a guilty consciousness which chilled her manner and partially paralyzed her tongue.

That letter! I am inclined to think, myself, it had been at the foundation of all the mischief. Reading it had been like dropping aniline dye into water; an easy thing to do, but alas, impossible ever to be undone! It was because of the new tinge given to her ideas yesterday that she had so woefully misunderstood Tim's speech: and to-day it was no better; he still looked strange to her, and she dared not talk to him in the old familiar way, lest she might be doing something forward, something he would misunderstand.

Besides, Mr. Phenix was close by her side, as unmanageable as the "old man of the sea," actually reminding her, in a loud tone, of a boat-ride she had promised to take with him; and how was Tim to know she had repented of the promise? and how was he to know this was the last day Mr. Phenix would ever call her "Janet," while he lived?

She caught Tim's eye for a moment. It was but a single transient, glittering glance: yet what would she have given to read it aright? She could almost fancy it was a look of pity.

As they all walked down to the landing to see the last of Mr. Braxton, she broke away from her tormentor, and rushed here and there in search of the pretty golden hop-clover, which was not to be found just here, as she very well knew.

"Tim might be engaged to anybody for sixteen years, and never behave like Mr Phenix," thought she in towering wrath. "Tim isn't a model gentleman,

and I never heard any remark made about his 'finished manners;' but he does have common-sense, without the least touch of softness. I do hate softness!"

As she dashed on in advance, then turned and came face to face with Mr. Braxton, her eyes were flashing; and he thought with pain that she seemed indifferent to his going away. This was not in the least like Janey, and contrasted strangely with the delight she had shown at his coming: still, something must be pardoned to a girl in her position. She was, of course, pre-occupied; and, though she might love old friends no less, yet in the very nature of things she would cease to feel the need of them, at least while the glamour lasted.

Tim considered that the object of his visit was attained: and that now, like the "good uncle" in the play, it was his part to say, "Bless you, my children," and "exit" with as little parade as possible; but, as for offering congratulations to the poor little deluded bride-elect, tortures could not have wrung them from his honest lips.

Janet drew her rings up and down her fingers, and looked wistfully at him—every inch a man—as he shook hands with all the "happy family" at the landing, turning last to her with a cordial, full-toned, "Good-by, Janey," which was destined to ring in her ears for many a day. Then he ascended the stairs to the upper deck of the steamboat, waved his handkerchief impartially to everybody, and sailed away, away out of Janet Keith's little world.

"An agreeable man; I am sorry to lose him," said the judge, eating a cucumber, and pursuing it to the "bitter end." He was going himself to-morrow, if so

be chance and Mrs. Whippowill would allow him to finish a certain plea which he had only begun to make the other night to Miss Harlcw.

Brenda had a basket on her arm, half filled with wild calla-lilies, and other specimens, which Mrs. Bangs considered "botany-flowers;" and she now stood near the judge, sprinkling the sand with their petals, and looking so young for her years that Mrs. Whippowill, who followed her like a dark shadow, pushed back her straightened crimps in despair.

Mr. Kyte sat on a rock, dangling a fishing-rod, and looking up with an amiable smile. Mr. Phenix settled his hat jauntily, and waited for the boy who was to appear with his boat.

"Here she comes," said he, referring to the boat. It was the first time Janet had gone rowing with him.

"And it will be the last," thought she, moving forward to the water's edge. "At first he was agreeable, then tolerable, but now he is odious. Tim's coming has opened my eyes to see the quality of him as I never saw it before. Indeed, if I had been able in the first place to compare him with Tim, I should have bowed politely and let him pass on."

"Don't go too far out, Phenix : keep near the shore," said Judge Davenport, dropping the remnant of his cucumber in the sand, and gazing after the young people with a troubled eye. "The wind is strong east."

Thus far, having found his student superficial in law, Latin, and politics, the judge had grave doubts whether he knew much about boats. Mr. Phenix smiled, however, with easy superiority, as if the navigation of a ship across the Atlantic would be to him mere play.

“Wonder if the boy knows enough to manage a boat in a squall?” queried the judge of Brenda, still unsatisfied.

A pertinent question, but it was not to be answered that day. For one thing, there was no squall; for another, Mr. Phenix did not go rowing. It happened in this way:—

He stood holding the rope of the wayward little craft with one hand, while he offered the other to Janet.

“I must be sure to say something very chilling and very decisive as soon as we are fairly out on the water,” thought Janet, gathering her drapery about her, preparatory to entering the boat.

At this moment Mr. Kyte looked up from his fishing-rod, and flashed out with one of his brilliant remarks: “It is a perfect day. As a friend of mine once remarked, ‘The sea and sky are exchanging glances, like a—h’m!—a pair of lovers.’ They are, now, really.”

They must have been quarrelsome lovers, then; for the sky was lurid and the sea wrathful. The comparison was as unfortunate as it was absurd. The party laughed; and Janet, already sensitive and overwrought, fancied they were laughing at her. Her hand trembled with vexation as she gave it to Mr. Phenix, and moving forward in blind haste, too ignorant of the water to be properly careful, planted both feet on the extreme edge of the right side of the boat.

Mr. Phenix cried, “Take care!” but the caution came too late. The dizzy little craft had already lost its balance, and he and Janet both went over.

It was high-tide, and the unexpected plunge into deep water gave them a shock; but Janet, never timid,

had no thought of fear. Mr. Phenix was just behind her, and would help her out, of course. She did not know that he could not swim. He caught convulsively at her skirts, but not to save her: it was only as a drowning man clutches at a straw; he was struggling to save himself!

Not a minute ago he had loved her with his whole heart, — such as it was, — and Salina Morse had been forever dethroned: but now this cruel shock had “probed him,” and, to use Tim’s phrase, “struck the hard pan of selfishness;” and what had become of his love?

It was clean gone; and his wits after it, or he would have remembered that Mr. Kyte and the judge could both swim, and there was no fatal necessity of dragging poor Janet down like a dead weight. He was sure to be saved; and so was she, if so be he would let her mercifully alone.

“Help!” cried the drowning man, though Mr. Kyte was already at hand, and the judge coming with utmost speed; but the drowning girl uttered no cry. She had sunk for the second time, when gallant Mr. Kyte seized her by the folds of her strong flannel dress, and drew her out, gasping and conscious.

“Oh, bless you! One can always depend upon *you*, Mr. Kyte,” cried Brenda, patting Janet on the back, as a restorative.

Nobody thought of crying, or making a scene, for the accident had not risen to the dignity of high tragedy. Nobody thought of calling Mr. Kyte a hero, for he had not even wet his feet in saving Janet.

As for Mr. Phenix, he had been his own deliverer,

thanks to his masterly fortitude in holding on by Janet's skirts. He was now scrambling up the beach, his faculties fully restored, the most humiliated wretch in existence.

The "probing" process had let light into his soul, — at least a flash of it, — and I suppose for a moment he saw himself as he really was; not the brave and honorable and chivalrous gentleman he had imagined, but a craven fellow, with less manliness than an ordinary boy ten years old.

Such an insight is wholesome, and in some natures works radical changes; but Mr. Phenix was too vain and shallow to profit by it. As soon as he had fairly caught his breath, and the judge had secured the boat, he rallied his forces, and began to excuse himself.

"Janet," said he, shaking his dripping forefinger at her playfully, — for he thought it as well to pass it off as a jest, — "do you know how we happened to go over? You stepped on the side of the boat."

"Yes, I know I did," replied she, with a look of politely suppressed contempt; adding to herself, "But that was not how I happened to *sink*."

If he had only thought it worth his while to make humble apologies for his weak behavior, she would have forgiven it; but this bravado was too much.

As they walked home to the cottage, the judge and Mr. Kyte supporting the dripping naiad between them, Mr. Phenix broke forth into loud lamentations about his watch, which had stopped in the water. Was it ruined? Was there a jeweller on the island who could tell him? Why, he would part with any thing he had, sooner than that precious watch!

As he shook it, and held it anxiously to his ear, the judge's brows lowered ; Brenda began to laugh nervously ; and Janet thought to herself, " He says it was a repeater ; it was a stem-winder ; it was full-jewelled. Of course it's worth a thousand times more than I am ; and, if he only *can* find a jeweller to mend it, I'm very sure he'll give *me* up without a sigh."

CHAPTER XXX.

"A SEA-CHANGE."

"I'VE suffered a sea-change, cousin Brenda : I never want to set eyes on Mr. H. Peabody Phenix again!" exclaimed Janet, as she stood in her own room, dryly "clothed, and in her right mind."

Brenda threw her arms about the girl's neck, and laughed and cried for joy.

"I'd like to stand on top of a minaret, and ring a bell," said she.

"Why, you bonnie wee darling, I didn't know you took it so to heart! If you disliked and understood him so entirely, why didn't you stop me before? I'm sure I was willing to be stopped."

"I wanted you to see him for yourself, child. I never meddled with an affair of the sort but once in my life, and then I burned my fingers. Besides, I was sure, as I told Mrs. Satterlee, that it would all pass away like a strain of music : so I was patient. As for marriage" —

"Oh, cousin Brenda, you horrify me! Marriage? Why, I never thought of any thing worse than an engagement! I assure you I've had hard work to convince him we were not engaged."

Miss Harlow smiled provokingly.

"Cousin Brenda, I will be heard now, and you sha'n't turn me off. Girls do need somebody to talk to," said Janet, her eyes softening with self-pity. "Why, the tortures I've suffered for fear that stony-hearted creature did or would care for me! You see, it all began by my being so vain and silly; and you always said, too, I was very credulous. Papa had laid such stress on my awkwardness, and lack of beauty, that I was perfectly astonished to have Mr. Phenix pass right by that really elegant, superior Miss Sanders and admire *me*; and I supposed he really did admire me, because he said so!

"Besides, cousin Brenda, Miss Sanders didn't like it, and that made it all the pleasanter. I know you'll despise me, but it's the truth.

"I let it go too far; but, the moment he began to talk seriously, I was frightened, and tried to show him his mistake. But he wouldn't see, and what could I do? *Could* I refuse him when he hadn't proposed?"

"It *would* have been difficult," admitted Miss Harlow, nodding, as she plaited her hair.

"Well, every day I grew indignant, and yesterday downright angry. And to-day, Brenda, I could have annihilated that man!"

"Still, the fault was yours in part, my dear."

"Yes: but my conscience is easy now; for, if he could be willing to let me drown, of course he doesn't love me, the cowardly, craven creature!"

"I wouldn't be too severe, Janet. You don't blame him for trying to save his own life?"

"Yes, I do: it wasn't worth saving."

Brenda laughed softly to herself.

"I wish Tim had been here to witness that performance. His visit has been very unsatisfactory to me, and I don't understand yet why he went so soon."

"I suppose for some reason he didn't have a good time," replied Janet, turning away and opening her drawer to search for a collar which happened to lie directly under that mysterious letter. Withdrawing her hand suddenly, as if she had had a galvanic shock, she added, "Yes, Tim ought to have been here to see Mr. Phenix distinguish himself. But do you know, I'm glad he didn't help me out of the water; for it wouldn't be so easy to cut him if he'd saved my life."

That Mr. Phenix's "cut" would be a final and a fatal one, was very evident from the peculiar set of Janet's lips as she pinned her collar; and Brenda, well pleased, began to hum the "nonsense-verse," —

"They went to sea in a sieve, they did,
In a sieve they went to sea."

Janet looked up in quick alarm; but of course the quotation was a mere coincidence, as she saw next moment.

"Yes, it *was* an egg-shell of a boat; and when I stepped on the side of it, it was the wisest step I ever took! I am glad the thing capsized. — Little boat, I thank you!"

Janet's manner toward Mr. Phenix at dinner was so freezing that the judge at the extreme end of the table "felt it like the breeze from an iceberg," he afterward said.

"Don't mention icebergs," laughed Miss Harlow: "it came from one of the rock-bound peaks of the Alps, whose snow never melts."

"All the better," responded the judge; for it suited him that "his little girl" should not relent toward his unpromising student.

The young people met that afternoon in a little dell whither Janet had gone to gather wild flowers.

"Do let me assist you: you'll scratch your fingers," entreated Mr. Phenix tenderly.

"Oh! it's not of the slightest consequence. Thank you, don't trouble. I suppose you haven't discovered yet whether your watch can be mended?"

"N-o," replied the young man, coloring with shame; "but I can find out to-morrow in Portland as I go home."

"Ah! so you go to-morrow? It will be pleasant for the judge to have your company. Please give my love to Mrs. Satterlee."

"Janet, Janet!" said Mr. Phenix, in tones of anguish, "you'll break my heart!"

"How so? I'm sure I do feel so very much interested about that watch!"

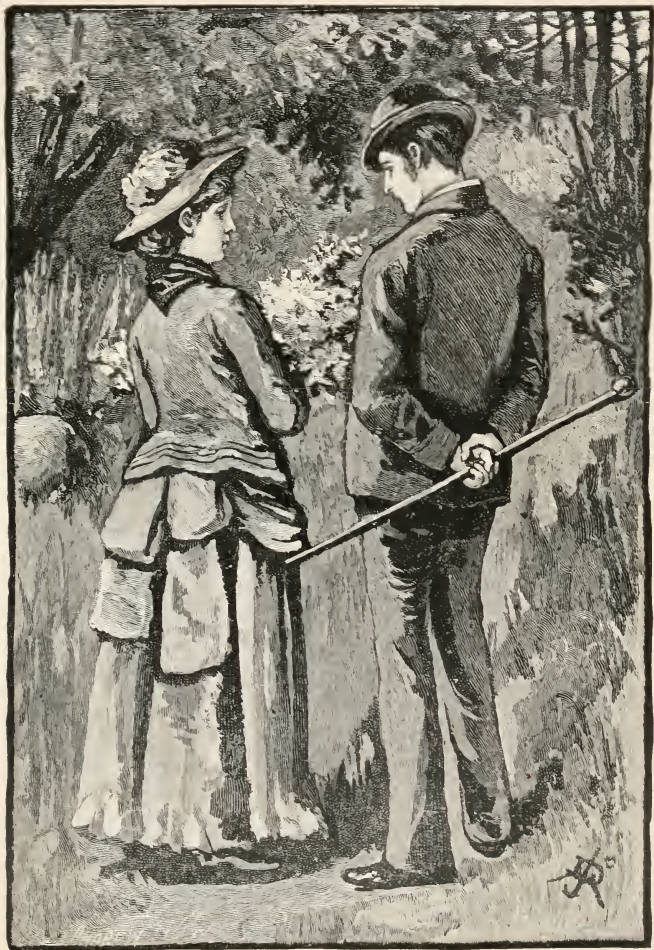
"Janet," — still more embarrassed, — "you forget that I labor under the painful disadvantage of being unable to swim."

"Oh, no! you made it very clear. I don't forget it at all. Please give my *best* love to Mrs. Satterlee and the children."

"And being, as I said, unable to swim, I naturally" —

"Oh, certainly! why do you apologize? It was my fault, stepping on the edge of the boat. My regards to Mr. Teague when he returns from Barbet Ridge."

"O Janet! And of course I knew Mr. Kyte and



“The young people met that afternoon in a little dell.” — PAGE 258.

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the judge would come to your assistance: you see, I depended on that."

"Why, Mr. Phenix, please don't think or speak of it again! You were only a little frightened: I *never* thought you meant any harm. And I should be very glad to send my love to Mrs. Bangs."

"Janet, if you have no mercy, no feeling, no compassion, I *shall* go home to-morrow!"

"Oh! I thought it was settled."

Their eyes met. For the first time in their acquaintance each caught a glimpse of the other's inner self, — these two young creatures who had been playing at the dangerous game of love.

Mr. Phenix drew his breath hard.

"It *is* settled," said he, and turned away so meekly that Janet began to melt.

"Don't go so," said she in a different tone. "Sha'n't we shake hands, Mr. Phenix? I'm not at all offended; indeed, I'm glad this happened, for I understand you now as I never did before. I'm not angry, Mr. Phenix: *that* isn't the feeling; I'm sure you know it isn't that!"

He did know: he comprehended the situation perfectly. He had forfeited her respect and esteem, and with them the million dollars that had hovered enticingly above her head, "coloring her hair" with an elusive radiance he should never behold again on sea or land.

The two shook hands in a conventional manner which even Miss Salina Morse might have approved, and from that decisive moment the Calais girl's star was in the ascendant.

Next day Mr. Phenix and Judge Davenport left the island; taking with them Mrs. Whippowill, who had intended to remain longer, but decided at the last moment that sea-air did not agree with her — crimps. Mr. Kyte watched the steamboat pensively through his eye-glasses, and, though he made no lament, felt that island-life had lost its chief charm.

He was not far wrong. A heavy fog began to hang white over water and land, confining the ladies in doors, and lowering the tone of their spirits. Miss Harlow knit furiously on a worsted shawl especially reserved for seasons of depression; Mrs. Loring read novels; Janet mused.

“What precisely had been the matter with Tim? And why didn’t he write?” This was the burden of her thoughts.

“I remember I said once that life is hidden in a mist: looking backward you can’t see the beginning, and looking forward you can’t see the end,” said she, peering through the spy-glass into blank, colorless space.

She did not quite mean that she could not see the beginning of Tim’s strangeness, for she had a growing conviction that the cause lay with Mr. Phenix. She reviewed again and again Mr. Braxton’s every look and word and tone, and was almost sure he had gone away believing a lie.

Had he gone *because* he believed it, because it made him unhappy? Then the letter *was* true; then he had cared for her, and did care still!

There was something very trying about it. This was a strange world, stranger than she had supposed.

How easily things go wrong just for lack of the right word at the right moment, just for want of a little thought!

Of course she only loved Tim as a very dear friend, not at all in any other way; still it was torture to have him so wofully misled. But who would undeceive him, — that is, in case he had been deceived? Not Brenda, who knew nothing about it, and beside abhorred meddling; and surely not Janet, who could not abide the name of Phenix now, much less mention him gratuitously to Tim.

The fog-horn moaned all night, and the mist-sheets huddled closer together till they hid the friendly harbor and the electric lights from the city. Brenda rolled up her time-worn knitting-work regretfully one day, and said, —

"We might as well go back to the sunshine; don't you think so, Mr. Kyte? We've waited a whole week, and this veil does not lift."

"Certainly, Miss Harlow, if you ladies are tired of it we ought to go: we ought, now, really," replied the gallant martyr, his eye-glasses dancing with pure delight.

He had just groped his way up from the post-office at the landing, with the long-delayed letter from Mr. Braxton. It was to Miss Harlow, merely announcing his safe return, and stating that Miss Fanny Lucas had accepted the position of intermittent companion to his sister; a good thing for both parties, Fanny being in need of money, and Mrs. Vail of cheerful society. The head of the family knew nothing about it, as Fanny never intruded upon his hours at home.

“It was partly my suggestion,” said Miss Harlow. “You know, I’ve been saying all the time we should feel much easier if your mother had some congenial person with her.”

“And Fanny is the very one, for her spirits never droop. Tim will be glad to have her there, too, for she was always a particular favorite of his,” remarked Janet, taking her laces from the bureau for Miss Harlow to pack, as if she were hunting for a forgotten dream.

CHAPTER XXXI.

NEWS OF TIM.

QUINNEBASSET had not moved a hair's-breadth, except that the rolling of the globe had brought the town a shade nearer to the autumnal season. If there was no fog here, there was rain; and as the tourists drove up to Mrs. Satterlee's door, they overtook Mr. Page driving home his cow, with an umbrella over his head that served as drapery, the wind blowing it about his person in clinging folds.

"Why, you don't say you've got back before you was expected!" he exclaimed in surprise. "Well, that's most as good as having the sun come out, — seems if."

"A thousand times better!" cried Judge Davenport, rushing forth in the rain with youthful eagerness to meet the carriage.

He said at once that the fog had agreed with Miss Harlow; and was so honestly glad of it, and looked so little like a rejected lover, that she was puzzled to know what to think of him.

"Some men can't take 'No' for an answer," she reflected, trying to give a touch of frost to her greeting.

Still, as she tripped into the house with her old elastic step, she smiled very sunnily. Perhaps she ought

to be glad to find that her old friend had been less crushed than she thought.

It evidently pleased her to be at home again, and Janet was proud to look on and admire her. She had always been a queen in her own little court at the Satterlees', and to-night received greater homage than ever, the "happy family" sitting spell-bound around her to listen to her racy, sparkling talk.

The only change at the Satterlees' was the loss of Mr. Phenix, who had gone to Calais, and did not intend to resume the study of law.

"Brendy," said Mrs. Bangs privately next morning, "I've kind of picked it out of the judge that it's all over between Jinny and that young lawyer. And there, I see you feel just as pleased about it as I do! You don't know, Brendy, how hard I've *fit* all summer to keep from speaking my mind."

It was a month before Janet heard again from Mr. Braxton. He had apparently resolved not to burden her with his correspondence, as she learned all family matters now by way of Fanny Lucas. Fanny had told him that she was teaching a class at Poonoosac. He was glad she had found such an efficient friend in Mr. Teague, glad she was so well and happy, etc. His letters would have done honor to an affectionate grandfather.

October came. The silver poplars on the river-bank were half turned to gold, the maples looked as if coals of fire had been heaped on their heads, and the woodbine near Mrs. Satterlee's gate encircled the elm like a living flame.

News came that Mr. Phenix was "on a Boston

newspaper.” Janet took pains to write this to Fanny Lucas ; though Fanny had so little knowledge of or interest in the young man, that she was hardly likely to repeat it to Tim.

Next it was certain that Mr. Phenix was engaged to a Miss Morse of Calais. This fact also Janet carefully mentioned to Fanny, who might, or might not, think enough of it to tell it again.

The moment the letter was gone, she regretted that she had not said explicitly, “Tell Tim about this.” But it was too late now, and a fatal consciousness deterred her from alluding to the subject again : she could not let it appear that she regarded it as vitally important.

The winter was long and cold, and Janet tired of Quinnebasset snow ; but when it was mixed in due time with spring mud, she liked it still less, for it interrupted her classes.

The spring in Brooklyn was neither muddy nor dull ; and Fanny Lucas found it delightful at Mr. Vail’s, with “dear Mr. Braxton” always running in. “Between ourselves, Janet, he grows so tender of your mother that I suspect ‘Papa Vail’ is becoming very irritable : indeed, I know he is, for I hear it talked of a good deal, and people predict that his brain will take fire. I don’t believe a word of this, still I keep out of his way as much as possible. I wish I could stay longer with your mother, but I ought to be establishing myself very soon.”

She referred to an amateur kindergarten-school which she had long been talking of. If she should succeed, the thanks would all be due to “dear Mr. Braxton.”

"I wonder her uncle Bradbury doesn't help her," thought Janet somewhat sharply.

Tim's kindness must be extraordinary; for Jessie Wilder talked of it, and called him the patron saint of Fanny's school, which presently began to flourish in a manner quite novel and surprising.

One evening Miss Harlow was copying a magazine-story; while not far from her, at the same table, sat Janet poring over a letter which had lain for at least half an hour in her lap.

"You find something very absorbing there," said Miss Harlow, lifting her eyes at last with some curiosity.

"Only a letter from Jessie Wilder: nothing very new, — hardly any thing in it."

Cousin Brenda paused again to erase a word, and Janet added incidentally, —

"Tim has taken a larger office, and has a great increase of business."

"Delightful! Why hasn't he told us?"

"And, for another thing, he is very attentive to Fanny, — Fanny Lucas, I mean."

"You surprise me," said cousin Brenda, dropping her pen: "does Jessie say that?"

"Yes: that is, she sees something of the sort coming — in the distant future."

"Oh, folly! What does she know of the distant future?"

"And I'm trying to picture Tim and Fanny engaged," said Janet in a particularly gay tone.

The picture did not please her, however; for cousin Brenda, watching her keenly, could detect no gladness in her face to match her tones.

“Begging Jessie Wilder’s pardon, I don’t believe that story,” said Miss Harlow, laying aside her writing, and moving her chair up to the fire.

“But I do, cousin Brenda. Jessie isn’t sentimental; and she has said things before that set me thinking of this, — thinking, you know,” said Janet in the same sprightly tone, “how beautiful it will be for Fanny. Tim is certainly the best young man in the world.”

“Um! um! A good young man, but not the best in the world, by any means!” flashed out Miss Harlow quickly, with another penetrating glance. Then to herself, “I don’t pretend, at my time of life, to account for all the freaks of young people; and Tim may not have the feeling for Janet that I suspected a year ago. I thought then it was a deep-seated attachment, and she was blind to it; but it looks now, considering his coolness for the past year, as if the feeling is on her side, and not at all on his. Poor child, I can’t allow that!”

She coughed spiritedly.

“Tim is a good boy; but even if this is true, you and Jessie needn’t be so very enthusiastic over it. For perhaps he might not make Fanny happy: he is full of faults.”

Janet twisted her letter in silence, but looked incredulous. Not make Fanny happy!

Brenda set both dainty feet on the fender. They were exquisitely pretty, but she was not thinking about them: as she once remarked, she had “never been driven to the extremity of being vain of her feet.”

“Yes, he would not make Fanny happy unless they

were suited to each other. At any rate, she is reasonably happy without him, isn't she? Her good conscience ought to make her so."

"But, cousin Brenda, one's conscience, you know, is high up in the top of the head: it doesn't reach down to the heart, and satisfy the affections."

Brenda coughed derisively. She was not going to encourage sentimentality.

"Oh, folly! I know that to young girls, love seems to cover the whole of life, and life without it seems too dull to be borne; but this can't be true, Janet, and, if you believe it, you commit yourself to certain error."

"But weren't women intended to be loved?"

"Certainly: that is as true as that the sun was made to shine. But for all that, the world being just what it is, there are, and will be, many, many women obliged, by force of circumstances, to live alone. And must they consider their lives failures? You accuse me of writing love-stories, and so I do sometimes; and love is a beautiful thing, if God sends it: but it is only one thing, Janet, and life is made up of a thousand. With that one thing gone, — and it is very apt to go: indeed, to some it never comes at all, — with that one thing gone, there is really more left than a woman has time for. Look at me: am I such a very unhappy being?"

She did not seem like it certainly. There was no "blight" in her mischievous smile as she sat leaning back cosily in her easy-chair, nibbling chocolate-drops and tossing one to Janet to sweeten the sharpness of her discourse. Miss Harlow, as Janet knew, had sur-

vived the death of the only man she ever loved: yet this was the way she talked to his niece!

How many times had the young girl longed to confide in her, and been deterred by that fine reserve, which was at once cousin Brenda's charm and her shield!

"You forget that everybody isn't like you," said Janet, waxing bold. "You have a great deal to think about; you have a mission: *you* need not marry to be happy. But for all that you will!"

A soft pink flush overspread Miss Harlow's cheeks.

"Who told you that? I sha'n't marry unless I'm perfectly sure of my own mind, — and maybe not then!"

"But the dear old judge, do you mean to keep him waiting forever?"

"Perhaps: he takes his own risks. Well, child, if we can't find any thing better to discuss than these sentimental subjects, I propose going to bed."

CHAPTER XXXII.

A CHANGE OF BASE.

JANET KEITH differed in some respects from Janet Vail. She had learned a little wisdom "at her own expense," was sweeter, larger-minded, with a firmer faith and a stronger sense of duty. This Janet would hardly have found it possible to desert a feeble mother, let her own wrongs cry out as they might; for this Janet meant not to please herself, but —

"To feel, to think, to do
Only the holy right,
To yield no step in the awful race,
No blow in the fearful fight."

And she felt that God was with her in the way she tried to walk.

But for all that, life grew complex and hard to understand, as it must with most young girls as the years flow on. It disappointed her, and she said sometimes with a sigh, —

"Oh, the unfulfilled intentions, the lost days, the bitter mistakes, how they blow about the world like dead leaves!"

Nevertheless Miss Harlow saw with satisfaction that her courage was still high, that the "poor heiress" still looked forward to carving a fortune for herself in time.

She quite repudiated the idea of ever marrying, and, having already saved a modest sum of money, had resolved to enter the Musical Conservatory at Boston, though perhaps not before November. She thought her dependence must always be on the kindred arts of music and elocution.

In the summer Mrs. Vail, growing desperate enough to defy her husband's commands, began to write to her daughter.

"I don't know what Tim would say if he knew how I am opening my heart to you [she said]. He seems to feel always that you must be shielded. 'Can't we manage to bear our troubles together, and leave her in peace?' has been his refrain all the while. You see, he understands every thing; for since Papa Vail has grown so unreasonable I've gone to Tim for sympathy. Fanny Lucas was a sunbeam in the house, but I couldn't confide in *her*; and of course since she is lost to me I feel more forlorn than if I had never had her at all.

"O Janet, if you could only come to me! A dearer brother than Tim never lived: but you know how his heart is divided, and I need the whole of somebody; I need *you*."

"How is Tim's heart divided?" asked Miss Harlow.
"Between your mother and aunt Rossy, I suppose."

"I think," replied Janet with calm conviction, "mamma refers without doubt to Fanny Lucas."

Miss Harlow coughed doubtfully. But she blamed Harriet Vail for writing so unreservedly to Janet without the knowledge of either her husband or Tim, and, quite reckless of consequences, urging her to go back.

Janet was greatly disturbed. She saw, as she had not seen before, that her life in Quinnebasset had been a full and happy one, in spite of occasional discontent.

It was no small thing for an orphan girl to be free and independent, surrounded by true friends, and looking forward hopefully to a useful if not a brilliant career.

"And your mother would be willing to have you throw away these beginnings, and go back to be what you called yourself once, 'a Chinese tree in a flower-pot!'" said Miss Harlow, taking out her sewing in disdain.

"I would almost rather die than go back," replied Janet, her face very pale, and with a lightning-like flame in the eyes that fixed themselves on her cousin. "I hope I never shall feel it my duty."

The closing sentence somewhat startled Miss Harlow, who knew the sensitiveness of the girl's conscience.

"You must not admit the idea for an instant, child, unless your father himself sends for you. Besides, haven't *I* some claim? You had no right to come here and make me love you, and then go away and leave me forlorn."

"Oh, as for that, cousin Brenda, you could exist without me! When I see Judge Davenport come up to this room in the evening, and read his papers with such a serene face because you are near by, and see you look so happy for having him here, why, I see I'm not needed a bit!"

"Now, Janet!" said Miss Harlow with a confused and contrite face. "As if anybody or any thing could come between you and me!"

"I'm not complaining, dear. You are both so benevolent, so sensible, that you don't mind my staying in the room; but I've noticed my leaving it isn't a

deep affliction ! I can be gone all the evening, and not feel that I'm missed."

"Now, Janet !"

"O you bonnie wee darling !" said the young girl, drawing the little lady into her lap, "it's just as I want it to be, and I know what your mind is if you don't ; and you must keep house for the judge next winter, only I do hope you'll learn to make a decent cup of coffee !"

"No house will I keep unless you live with us, my dear."

"I'm beginning to find out," went on Janet in a slightly choked voice, not heeding this interruption, "to find out that I was made to love people better than they love me. It goes across the grain, but all discipline does that. Now, there's mother : she can't care for me as she does for her own little children ; but she needs me more than you do, and if I wasn't a selfish, cowardly girl, I'd fly to her in spite of Papa Vail."

The mournful letters kept on through the autumn. For a person who hated writing, Harriet Vail was developing great facility in the use of the pen.

"I've been very happy in Quinnebasset, but the comfort and charm are all gone now. Her last letter was a wail, and I suppose this is the same," said Janet, leisurely unfolding and refolding an unread sheet, with a little sigh, and looking at it as if she were about to take a cold sea-bath, and dreaded the first plunge.

"My darling, I'm sick and sad. It seems to me the grave would be such a soft and easy bed that I long to slip into it and be at rest ; but I must not go and leave my helpless children. Papa Vail grows worse continually. O daughter,

daughter! I cannot live without you any longer. There, I have said it!

“Dr. Devol has thought for two months that a crisis is impending in your father’s case, but we have heard that story so long that it has no effect on us. Come if you love me! He won’t object when you’re once here. It’s I who am his victim now, and as usual his frenzy spends itself in words. I would not ask for you if I were well; but we are all down with a violent epidemic that prevails here, something like pneumonia. I am on the lounge, and the children are both in bed. I have written this by snatches, with a raging fever.

“Come, my beloved daughter, and do not wait to write.”

The effect of this appeal on Janet may be imagined. She tossed the letter into Miss Harlow’s lap without a word; but there was a look of intense and concentrated energy in her full dark eye, and her fingers were knotted together in a vise-like grasp.

“Well?” said Miss Harlow, regarding her curiously as she finished reading.

Janet’s lips formed one or two words, but no sound issued from them.

“This letter isn’t official without Tim’s seal, my child. Your mother” —

“My mother needs me,” said Janet, speaking now in a full, firm tone. “I knew it would come to this, and I’ve been waiting to go as soon as I could be sure the call was loud enough. I was made for the hard work of life, cousin Brenda; and there’s nothing half so hard as living with father.”

“But you wouldn’t dare expose yourself to his displeasure! Have you ever thought, Janet, that it may be even dangerous? When Tim was here over a year ago, he told me he was thankful you were not at home.

He said he wished he were a physician ; for he perfectly longed to make out a certificate of insanity against Rufus Vail, and shut him away from his family. Oh ! it will be done yet," added Miss Harlow, her eyes flashing. She held the man accountable for his state of mind, and had little patience with "emotional insanity" induced by reckless disregard of well-known physical laws.

"I shall be in no more danger than mother is in all the time. What she can bear, I can bear," said Janet courageously.

"But if you were really needed, Tim would write."

"You forget that Tim isn't as clear-sighted as he used to be, cousin Brenda. His heart is divided."

"Oh, folly ! Half of Tim's heart would answer every purpose ! Write and ask his views about this."

"But it would take four days to receive an answer, and pneumonia is something that can't wait. Don't you know how fatal the disease has been this year ? And if mother or one of the children should die, and I not there, I never could forgive myself, never. No, cousin Brenda, I did wrong to come away in the first place ; and now all the atonement I can make is to go back. It is 'borne in upon me' that I ought to go back."

Brenda wavered. She had been satisfied for some time that Janet could not hold out much longer against the pressure brought to bear upon her affections and her conscience. If the child was to go before winter, she might as well go now. Moreover, Miss Harlow had herself great faith in the "inner light," and feared to darken it by too much opposition.

"Go to bed, you dearest girl ; and if your heart says

the same thing to-morrow morning that it says now, I'll try to hold my peace, and give you up."

After a night of serious reflection, as Janet was still firm, Miss Harlow offered no further remonstrance; and Mrs. Bangs "fit with herself" to maintain a like discreet silence, and assist in the packing.

"Jinny likes to do her duty better'n I do," said she aside to Brenda. "I declare, I have serious doubts of my own conversion when I look at that girl."

Janet breakfasted in her room; while Miss Harlow, not without strong emotion, informed Mrs. Satterlee and the boarders of the turn of affairs.

The "child" would set off in the eight-o'clock train. A murmur of surprise and grief went around the breakfast-table, for Janet had been a great favorite.

"Why, it's pure fanaticism!" was Mr. Teague's comment, dropping his knife and fork as if he thought of rushing out to appeal to the authorities.

"That girl has too much feeling, — a cell more in the heart than in the head; and it's useless trying to reason with such people," mourned the intellectual Miss Sanders, who had learned to love Janet sincerely, notwithstanding her deplorable lack of brains.

"The noblest young lady I ever saw: she is now, really!" sighed the chivalrous Mr. Kyte, who had ceased to adore Mrs. Whippowill, since that lady showed signs of laying her heart at his feet.

Judge Davenport cleared his throat at last, and delivered the eulogy, —

"She is worthy to sit at a king's right hand in thunder-storms."

And Mrs. Whippowill was unable to echo the sentiment for weeping.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE STORY-ROOM.

THE "happy family," much subdued, accompanied Janet to the cars on foot, while Mr. Page lumbered after them with the Saratoga trunk in an express-wagon.

It was a bright October morning after a heavy frost, which the sun had melted in such clear-cut lines that wherever the grass lay in shadow there were pictures in the exact form of the trees and houses overhead. Janet observed this as they walked along, and saw, too, that Delia Liscom had spread old calico dresses over some of the flowers in her garden. The milkweed by the wayside had turned a pale yellow, the leaves of the mullein looked like shrunken flannel, but the undaunted ragweed stood up fresh and valiant.

Winter was coming, it was not far away; yet Janet would gladly have braved once more the snows of Quinnebasset. She had a heavy heart of it; and, to add to her burden, Mr. Teague suggested that her father would probably turn her out of the house, and she would be obliged to come back and ask Mrs. Satterlee to take her in.

Who knew but this was true?

When she was seated in the cars, waving her final

good-bys, she wondered if it were just possible she might return in disgrace next week. And had the judge been right when he said there was "such a thing as overdoing even the cardinal virtues"? Was she a "headstrong girl" still, when it seemed to her that she was trying so hard of late to be governed by principle?

She had seen the last of Brenda's nodding plumes and twinkling smiles, the last of the judge's dark-featured, noble face. She was carrying away a picture of Mr. Kyte running at a sort of agonized trot to bring a forgotten bouquet; a picture of Mrs. Whippowill hovering close to him as she used to hover about the judge; of Mrs. Bangs standing as straight as a clothes-pin, and wiping her eyes defiantly; of Mrs. Satterlee handing a paper of sandwiches through the car-window; of Miss Sanders with her Sappho-like head; and of awkward Mr. Teague holding up wee Katie and then Teddy for a last kiss.

Strange what a hold all these people had taken upon her heart during her comparatively short stay in Quinebasset! She should love them as long as she lived.

The next scene of interest for Janet was the story-room in her own dear wretched "ice-palace" at home.

"Oh, you blessed, blessed child! Something told me you would be here to-day," said Mrs. Vail, sinking into her daughter's arms with a heart-sick cry. The children, down with heavy colds, rushed upon her, and clung to her neck so tightly as almost to stop her breath. Darling sister had come, and now everybody would be well again, they thought. Janet felt in a moment that she had taken up the old life again, and

there was no drawing back. Jamie, could that be little Jamie? And Bertha had grown so, the dear! But she was shocked to see how her mother had aged in a year and a half.

“It’s this terrible epidemic cold. I sha’n’t die, dear, now you’ve come,” said Mrs. Vail with a heavy sort of playfulness. “Come, Jamie, do let sister go a minute: I want her to pet *me*. I’ve had nobody to pet me, daughter, except Tim, for ever so long. Living so shut up as I do, my old friends forget me, I think.”

There was, perhaps, a grain of truth in this. Nervous prostration does become an old story in time; and people were blaming this poor little lady for staying in doors so much, and making herself ill. They talked wisely about the broken laws of health, not knowing — nobody could know — of the broken heart hidden carefully away from all the world.

“You’ll find Papa Vail changed, — oh, a good deal changed! His business is very hard on him, that is what ails him. If he keeps on growing worse, daughter, I fear” —

“Yes, yes, mamma, I know. It’s what we’ve always feared, but it has never come yet. But what of Tim? Did he know I was coming?” said Janet, looking carelessly at the soiled grate and disorderly room. She seemed quite unconcerned.

“No, he doesn’t know, dear. I told you that, and I suppose he’ll blame me when he finds it out. He hardly understands how much I need you. You’ll see him soon. He always runs in the first thing when he comes home from the city; to be ahead of Papa Vail,

who usually comes late. I must meet Papa Vail in the hall, and prepare him for you," said Mrs. Vail, searching as usual for her vinaigrette.

There was a timid flutter of her little helpless hands; and Janet saw it, but said soothingly, — the soothing process had begun again, — "Never mind, mamma: whatever father says or does, I can bear it now very well. I'm older and stronger than I was."

Then she stole a glance at the window, but her thoughts were of Tim. Why was it that she dreaded meeting this perfectly calm and friendly young man, dreaded it more than meeting her half-mad father? It was all because of that letter, the letter he had written long ago and forgotten. Reason with herself as she might, there was a spirit in it that would not be laid: there were words in it that rang in her ears as if just spoken.

How would he meet her? What would he say?

Tim had disapproved of sending for Janet, there is no doubt of that; yet when he dropped into the story-room two hours after her arrival, and found her there, his face beamed with pleasure quite as much as with surprise.

"What! Janey, our own little Janey? Bless you! But you had no right to come, you naughty girl," said he in whispers, for Mrs. Vail had fallen asleep on the sofa.

"Don't you think I'm needed?" returned Janet without rising; for she held Bertha in her arms, and Tim, dropping the flowers he had brought, had seized both her hands and was holding them fast.

"Needed? Yes: they are all sick here but **me**.

I'm the only one who has had the firmness to resist this epidemic. But, Janey, it's no place for you."

"Tim, how long has mother looked like this?"

"Then she is changed to you? Poor little Hattie!" said he, stealing to the lounge, and dropping the flowers on her breast.

"Yes, Tim, she is pitifully changed. And to think I ever should have left her!"

Mr. Braxton had come back now, and was standing behind Janet's chair. He did not say how much it was to him to see her there: that "went without the saying," and was moreover of small consequence, he thought, since she had not come for his sake, but her mother's.

"He has grown very indifferent," thought Janet with a pang.

She told him in whispers all he wished to know,—how her mother's despairing letters had brought her home contrary to everybody's advice; how sure she was that she had done right, and, whatever might happen, could never regret her course.

He bent over and laid his hand on her head with one of his unspoken blessings, and said no more about her having done a foolish thing: it was too late now for that.

"I've been all around the house," said she; "and what a state of confusion it is in! All the water-pipes gone, for one thing."

"Your father had them taken out in his zeal for health."

"Yes, I know. And there's only one servant, a stolid old thing, who looks as if she had sat in the sun and dried."

“Did your mother explain why good servants won’t stay?”

“Yes: father grows tyrannical, she says. Is he really so much worse?”

“Variable, Janey. Some days quite calm, then again stormy,” replied Tim, clinching his fist unobserved. He had decided to stay and witness the meeting of father and daughter, in order to be, if possible, some restraint upon Mr. Vail.

“What *is* it coming to, Tim? It seems as if you and mother are keeping back something for fear of distressing me.”

“You won’t see any new symptoms, Janey, only the old ones intensified. Have no words with him, don’t oppose him, and you may get on well.”

“Probably I opposed him too much when I lived at home: I shall know better now,” said she, bracing herself mentally.

And then they talked of other things, — of Tim’s new office, and his hanger-on, jolly Jack Flint; of the Quinnebasset people, beginning with cousin Brenda and ending with the Pages, without, however, mentioning Mr. Phenix. Tim could not have forgotten him; but did he know he was in Boston? had he heard of his engagement? Janet longed to enlighten him, but the facts refused to be told. Why is it, that, strive as we may, some names can never be spoken? What stern and wary sentinel keeps guard at our lips?

But Janet could and did speak of Fanny Lucas; all the more persistently, perhaps, because Tim praised her so much, and it was torture to hear him. Fanny’s energy, Fanny’s heroism, Fanny’s marked success, he

dwelt on these themes at length. It seemed she had refused aid from a rich uncle, her father's enemy. Yes; but how much time, influence, advice, she must have accepted from "dear Mr. Braxton," who was in no wise related to her! Fanny was a remarkable girl: the fact had been mentioned a great many times; and Janet admired her, oh, extremely! but we all know that admiration grows fatiguing after a while, and one turns for relief to something dull. Janet wished Jessie Wilder were at home, — commonplace Jessie, who fitted herself to one's needs like a sofa or an easy-chair, and never asked or expected praise. But Jessie was in Europe; and Fanny would come dancing in to-morrow, in the gayest spirits, to talk about herself, and make other people feel themselves so very insignificant! Fanny hadn't a fault in the world: she was merely overcharged with virtues; she was too vivacious, too witty, too handsome, too admirable, for poor, tired, imperfect human nature to bear. Tim had always set her above all the other girls in Brooklyn, but now he could hardly find words to express his admiration. Janet saw that he had her graces by heart: she was the "girl of girls" for him; and oh, how she hated herself because she cared!

She and Tim talked on in whispers, forgetting the flight of time. Papa Vail was not a punctual man; but to-night at the stroke of six his well-remembered, rapid footstep was heard in the gravel path.

"Don't let papa come yet," entreated little Bertha, lifting her drowsy head.

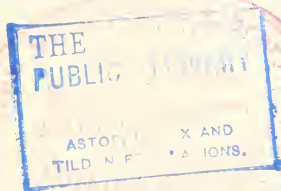
Papa was always good to her; but he darkened the house, she could not tell why. Children, like the rest

of us, carry with them their little atmospheres, and know when the wind is east.

Mr. Vail's foot touched the door-stone, the bell rang harshly. His wife started from her sleep, caught up the flowers Tim had dropped on her shawl, said "Thank you, dear," with a smile, and tottered toward the door.



“ Her father glared at her — no other word expresses it.” — PAGE 285.



CHAPTER XXXIV.

FANNY LUCAS.

MR. VAIL saw by the look of appeal in his wife's eyes as she met him, that something was wrong, and, waiting for no explanations, strode past her into the story-room, and confronted Janet.

It was a complete surprise to him, a hazardous one; and Mrs. Vail had good cause to tremble. She had meant to prevent this, but now that it had happened she was powerless to offer a word of excuse.

Janet had risen, and stood regarding her father; not as a suppliant, — for Tim's presence inspired her with courage, — but as Mr. Vail's oldest daughter, whose right and duty it was to come back to her home.

She waited for his greeting, but none came: her father glared at her — no other word expresses it. It was a dangerous moment. Tim saw the threatened storm, and to avert it sprang up from his chair quickly, saying, "Good-evening, Mr. Vail."

Instantly the mind of the half-insane man glanced off upon another track, and he turned indignantly to Mr. Braxton. What business had the fellow in his house? He had not been here for months, so far as Mr. Vail knew. Had *he* sent for Janet? and did he

come here now to defend her? Meddler, eavesdropper, he should be outwitted: he should see that Rufus Vail was a chivalrous, tender father, forgiving, and taking back his prodigal children to his bosom, without any outside pleading or interference.

“My darling daughter!” cried he, rushing toward Janet eagerly, “welcome home again, drop o’ me heart!”

“Drop o’ me heart” was what he had often called her with a fond Irish brogue, when she was a little girl of Bertha’s age, and he had really loved her. Janet was mystified, but returned his kisses, saying, —

“O father dear, I’m so glad you want me at home; for I wanted to come!”

Mrs. Vail staggered back to the sofa, ready to faint from revulsion of feeling. She had lain awake all last night, suffering from remorse and all sorts of anticipated horrors; and now, behold, there had been nothing to fear! Papa Vail had loved and needed his daughter all this while, only he would not admit it to his poor tortured wife.

Tim understood the scene better, and slipped out of the room shortly after this to go to report affairs to aunt Rossy.

“Hattie must have been desperate to send for that child. What was she thinking of?” said he.

The black shade of his face was reflected in his aunt’s, but transformed there to dove-color, so to speak: dove-color was the darkest tinge her soul was capable of receiving.

“Hattie is too impulsive,” she admitted; “but the Lord can use her weakness for his own purposes. Timo-

thy. We can't see why he permitted this ; but it will work for good, you may be sure of that."

She smiled as she spoke. Black had become white by this time ; and why not, since it had passed into a region of light ?

"Auntie, I believe there never will be a cloud in your sky so dense but you can see an angel's face shining through it : but you must remember I'm a poor sinner with not a fiftieth part of your faith ; and besides, I know Rufus Vail, and you don't," said Tim, pouring out his aunt's drops, and going to the kitchen to confer with Choo-foo.

This was the Chinese boy who served in the threefold capacity of cook, housemaid, and nurse.

"Choo-foo, I will take care of the sick lady tonight ; and you may go to Mr. Vail's, and help serve the dinner and make the house clean."

It was not the first time the slant-eyed youth had been sent thither on a like errand of mercy, and he set off now with an air of pleased importance. Mr. Vail highly approved of this gratuitous service, but it cost Tim rather dear. Long days of hard work in New York were followed often at night by the care of aunt Rossy, not to mention the distant watch he always kept over his sister's family ; but Tim was a patient soul, who "drank the cup of life as it came, and never stirred it up from the bottom."

To his surprise, Mr. Vail kept up the *rôle* of the magnanimous parent for several days—indeed, till Janet was heartily tired of it. She told Tim her father's make-believe affection repelled her far more than his anger had ever done ; and she was really re-

lieved when he dropped the mask, and began to storm as of old. She was not afraid of him now; she did not even listen to his words: they rattled about her head like drops of rain against a steel helmet, and fell to the ground without effect.

Her mother thought she had “matured surprisingly,” but in truth there had always been in Janet a tougher fibre than appeared. If it had been possible two years ago for Mrs. Vail to unseal her lips and confide in her young daughter, she would have found her a tower of strength, instead of a “bone of contention.” It was her mother’s reticence, and her own misinterpretation of it, that had grieved and estranged her, even more than her father’s severity.

It was touching now to see how Mrs. Vail leaned on her elder daughter, how her drooping spirits revived in the inexpressible comfort of her presence.

“Janet has such a restful manner,” she said. “And, Tim, you needn’t carry the burden of me on your heart any longer; for if Papa Vail should lose his money, — and it’s a thousand wonders he doesn’t, — why, my daughter could support the family. I’m beginning to take a little pleasure in life, in spite of Papa Vail,” she added, looking up guiltily from her Kensington; “for if he *should* grow worse and worse, and become really violent, why, it might prove a blessing in disguise, for then he would have to be taken care of, you know.”

This was Mrs. Vail’s delicate way of indicating a lunatic-asylum; and it really seemed as if her spirits brightened in an inverse ratio as the domestic shadows lengthened. She liked to dwell upon the strange things Papa Vail said and did: how he had forbidden Tim the

house since Janet's return, and, finding one of that obnoxious gentleman's sleeve-buttons on the hall-carpet, had sent for the coachman to pick it up and grind it to powder; how, half an hour afterwards, he had discharged the same coachman with high words, because of signs of throat-ail in one of the horses. He dismissed his confidential clerk, Mr. Madison Tukey, pretty regularly every month, and as regularly took him back again; till Mr. Tukey, losing all self-respect, began to feel that he was bound forever to the wheel of Ixion. One of Mr. Vail's peculiar symptoms was his distrust of other people's sanity. He saw a dreadful "shakiness" in people in general, just as the drunkard sees a dangerous tendency in houses and lamp-posts to reel and stagger as he goes by. His wife's reason was about to topple over, so was Mr. Tukey's, Tim's, Janet's, and he even feared for his own little children. Janet found it necessary to warn them not to laugh in his presence; though they seldom needed the caution, poor things!

All the same, however, in despite of Mr. Vail's crazy fancies, and of his tempestuous and trying behavior at home, he was not likely to be "taken care of" very soon. It was admitted in New York that he was very excitable; but it is not easy to put a man in a strait-jacket, who never shows the least "muddle-headedness" in his affairs, whose advice is sought everywhere, and, above all, whose credit is good for untold gold on Wall Street.

Rufus Vail, like other partially insane people, was a psychological study; and, though I do not enjoy such studies, it has been necessary to dwell somewhat mi-

nutely upon this one in order to give a true idea of Janet's situation at home. It is needless to say she did not find it very exhilarating.

The children were cross; the sun-dried servant disappeared, and half a dozen successors entered the kitchen only to pass out of it. Even Choo-foo ceased to gild it by his yellow presence; for aunt Rossy grew worse, and he was urgently needed at home.

Housekeeping was something for which Mrs. Vail had neither the nerve nor the muscle; and it fell with full weight upon unpractised Janet, who submitted to the drudgery without complaint, and found a grim satisfaction in spoiling her hands. To add to her miseries, her father had formed a friendship for a handsome, middle-aged Spaniard, Mr. Hilario Poliedro, and often invited him to the house of an evening, intimating that as he was a wealthy bachelor he must be treated with distinguished attention.

"I wonder you will submit to such despotism," said Fanny Lucas, in a slightly rasping voice. (If Fanny had a defect, it was that voice.) "You always had so much spirit, Janet, that I was very much surprised at your coming back at all; and now what depths you'll fall into, I don't know," added the outspoken friend, patting the pretty golden fluff that hung over her forehead, while her bright, capable eyes roved to the incipient hole in Janet's sleeve. "It's too bad to waste one's talents: don't you think so, dear?"

Janet remembered Fanny's amateur kindergarten, the delight of thirty little girls and half as many mothers, and answered meekly, —

"Yes, Fanny, if one has any talent."

“Oh, fie, Janet! there’s your music; and you might have been as good a scholar as I, if you’d only remained at school,” said Fanny patronizingly. “And now to bury yourself like this! Mr. Braxton thinks it is such a pity you didn’t ask his advice before you came.”

“Did he say that to you, Fanny?”

“To be sure he did; but not in the least harshly, not in a way that need make you look like that. He appreciates your feelings; he *knows* you didn’t come back from any mercenary motive.”

“Mercenary?” cried Janet, with a shock of pain which brought a crimson flush to her brow. “Could anybody think I came expecting to get any of father’s miserable money?”

“There, you *are* such a dear, single-minded, unworldly creature!” said Fanny with an admiring but rather condescending smile. “I told Mr. Braxton it was just like you not to think of public opinion; and we both agreed we wouldn’t distress you by alluding to it, and here I’ve done it without a thought! Do forgive me. *We* know you are pure gold, dear: *we* know you deserve to be canonized.” And Fanny kissed her friend tenderly on either cheek, and hurried away to her happy task, quite unaware that she had inflicted lasting pain.

“Mercenary motives!” repeated Janet; but she did not linger upon the foolish speech of people who did not love her: let it go for what it was worth. “Mr. Braxton and I,” — these were the words that cut deepest.

“How entirely she appropriates Tim! and why should I care?” thought Janet, feeling as if his

affections had been rifled from her by some subtle robbery, though she well knew Fanny Lucas was incapable of guile. "I ought to walk across the city with pease in my shoes, to do penance for a wrong thought of her. She is my superior in every thing. Yet what shall I do? I never see her without having wicked, hateful thoughts."

CHAPTER XXXV.

MR. POLIEDRO.

“DO you never rest?” said Tim, coming in one morning while Janet was setting the story-room in order, with little Jamie riding on her back.

He drew the child away, chiding him gently for tiring poor “Dinny.”

“Don’t say a word, Tim: Jamie is just as old as my little brother Harry was when he died, and I can’t refuse him any thing,” said warm-hearted Janet, who, having suffered all her life from repression, was over-indulgent now to the children; a great weakness surely, but Tim thought he had never seen any thing lovelier than the expression that rose to her winy-brown eyes as she spoke.

“Well, how goes it, Janey, this housekeeping?”

“Pretty well,” replied she cheerily. “We have a new girl who is too good to be true, and father likes her thus far, because she happens to be pretty.”

“And you’ll work all the morning, and then sew buttons on the children’s frocks in the afternoon, I suppose.”

“Yes, there are buttons, of course: but backgammon is still worse; the rattling of the dice has a foolish sound to me, like the crackling of fagots under a pot ”

“Yes: your mother must be amused, her nerves must be sheathed in velvet. If I were you, Janey, I’d run away again.”

“Never! fancy me doing that now! No, Tim: if I’d known at the time what I know this minute, I never would have gone at all. I really thought it would prove a help to mother, but there I made a grievous mistake.”

Tim ran his fingers through his bushy hair without a word.

“Don’t you see, Tim, it was a mistake?”

“No, you couldn’t have borne much more. You think you could, now that you’ve recovered from the strain; but there’s a limit to all things, Janey. Oh! by the way, — I forgot my errand, as usual, — I’ve called three separate times to invite you to the oratorio, and never can think of it. However, I’ve secured the tickets all the same.”

“Oh, thank you! But what a pity! What a shame! I was just going to tell you that horrid Mr. Poliedro was here again last night, and asked me to the concert; and Papa Vail made me say yes. Did he do right?”

“No,” thundered Tim: “it isn’t the proper thing at all! What does he know of Mr. Poliedro? What does anybody know, except that he claims to own half the island of Cuba? Your father — But hold!” added Tim on a lower key: “I’m talking of him as if he were a reasonable being.”

Janet’s face had assumed a look of distress amounting almost to terror.

“What shall I do? Papa Vail knew just how I

hated it, but he would have it so; and now he has gone this very morning to order me a dress for the occasion, and Miss Pike is coming to make it."

"Oh, well! Janey dear, don't take it so to heart," said Tim, laying his hand on her shoulder caressingly. "I spoke in such a rough way that I frightened you, didn't I? But we'll manage this thing, and have it all right: trust it to me."

"Oh, if you only will see to it, you good boy!" said Janet, drawing a deep, shuddering breath, and looking up at him confidently.

"I'll tell you what we can do, Janey: Fanny and I will go in company with you and Mr. Poliedro, and that will save the proprieties."

"So it will," said Janet, trying to look grateful.

Then he had bought three tickets, it seemed! She might have known, when he first spoke of the concert, that he could not have meant to take her without Fanny.

"But, Tim, it's too bad to intrude my forlorn necessity upon you in this way, and I'm sorry for it," said she, feeling most acutely certain that he and Fanny would have chosen to go by themselves.

"As if you could intrude," said Mr. Braxton, puzzled, and a little hurt by the cold manner with which she drew away from him.

"Why, I mean, it won't be half so pleasant dragging Mr. Poliedro into the party. But do please understand, I'm very thankful for the kindness; and what I should do without you, Tim, I'm sure I don't know," said Janet, thawing at once.

Yes, that was strictly true. What would she, or

any one else, do in Papa Vail's present condition if Tim were not so near, and always ready to "lend a hand"? Without Tim she could hardly have endured her life, she thought: yet it must be confessed he made her strangely unhappy at times. The instinct had been prophetic which led her to dread being near him again. He was too dear, and too good altogether: there was the mischief. He could not help it; for the ground-melody of his soul was sympathy, — that rarest of masculine characteristics, — and it was always his way to be more gentle and pitiful, the more you needed his kindness. Why, it almost seemed, now and then, — such was his exquisite tenderness, — it almost seemed as if that letter must have been written in earnest, and as if he could write another to-day just like it if nothing stood in the way! But Janet fought this idea as dangerous and absurd. It was as bad as those foolish fancies about her unknown brother. No: the peculiar state of feeling described by Tim might or might not have existed at the time of his writing that note; but, at any rate, there was no evidence that it existed now. He thought no more of it at this moment than of the apple-blossoms that fell into the grass last year. He had outlived it all, as men do; and now his affections were transferred to Fanny, who deserved them far more than Janet. It was useless to accuse him of fickleness: men are expected to be fickle. And then, again, that mistake about Mr. Phoenix might be at the bottom of it, and it might not.

Alas! it was all in a Scotch mist. Janet speculated a great deal about this strange and wonderful life of ours, which we shape so crookedly for ourselves, not

knowing what we do. But one thing seemed clear to her: it was her manifest duty to avoid indulging in unwarrantable fancies. It was necessary to believe that Tim was attached to Fanny; and, if a comfortable doubt of this ever arose in her mind, she was bound to crush it down. It was fortunate that she was heart-whole, — very fortunate! Otherwise she could pity a girl situated just like herself, in daily companionship with a man who was really almost one's ideal of what a man should be! But, if there was any thing Janet knew, it was that she did not love Tim. She told herself this a great many times a day. She had had, to be sure, a distant, vanishing, bird's-eye view of what love might be; and really the possibilities were fearful, in the case, for instance, of a weak-minded young girl, who gives her affections unsought. Janet was thankful that she had been better instructed, and was in no danger of falling into such a sad error as that!

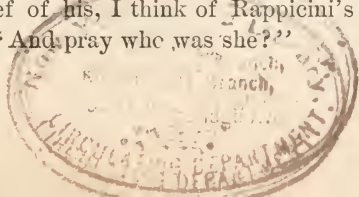
The day of the oratorio of "The Messiah" came around; and Miss Pike and Mrs. Vail had outdone themselves in the elaboration of Janet's new dress, but the girl seemed hardly grateful.

"Oh, yes! it is simply perfect, thank you; and if I could only have gone with Tim! I wish Mr. Poliedro had asked you, mamma. Why don't old gentlemen escort ladies nearer their own age?"

"Mr. Poliedro isn't more than forty-five, dear, and a very charming person."

"Do you call people charming who use perfumery? Why, mother, every time he takes out that handkerchief of his, I think of Rappicini's daughter."

"And pray who was she?"



"Oh! a girl who inhaled the odor of poisonous flowers, till her very presence was poisonous, like deadly nightshade or a miasma."

"Why will you read such absurd stories, dear? It was only this morning you compared the poor man to some character in mythology, I forget what."

"Oh, no! a character in a German poem. I said he was like Mephistopheles, — the spirit of evil in modern society; and so he is, mamma. Mr. Poliedro knows a great deal, and at the same time he doesn't seem to me like a 'good individdle,' " said Janet, mimicking his broken English.

Mrs. Vail looked troubled.

"Still, you'll have to go to the concert with him, daughter: so don't fail to treat him with civility," said she, standing a little way off to admire the effect of the new dress.

"But, mamma, we know nothing about him; and isn't it very improper for Papa Vail to receive him into the bosom of the family in this way? Don't you think we yield to Papa Vail's wishes entirely too much? Oh! what will he be doing next?"

"Something desperate, I hope, daughter, so that he can be taken care of," sighed Mrs. Vail with reckless impetuosity; though she was far from meaning precisely what she said. "Desperate," as applied to a madman, is a word of awful purport, not to be lightly spoken.

Though music was a passion with Janet, she entered Steinway Hall that evening with an air of resigned depression, which the girl of the period would have found it hard to understand. The distinguished Mr.

Poliedro was quite the fashion just then in certain circles; and his appearance in public with an unknown young lady naturally attracted some attention. But Janet seemed supremely unconscious of this. She sat gazing at the orchestra with an introverted expression, thinking of any thing in the world but the eyes of beholders. She was looking unusually well to-night in a pearl-tinted silk, trimmed with heavy lace, and no ornament except a knot of Parma violets at one side of her red-gold crown of waved hair.

“I’d like a picture of her, to be called ‘Waiting for the Music.’ Give Janey a breath of excitement, and how she surprises you by her beauty!” thought Tim.

Her face was rosy with the sweetest, tenderest flush, — a dawn-like loveliness, which seemed to come from the auroral brightness of her hair. Tim’s glance roved to Miss Lucas, who was gracefully waving her glittering fan. She was prettier; but, whether Mr. Braxton knew it or not, she had not Janet’s complex fineness of expression, and for the best of reasons, — though a “remarkable girl” in many respects, she lacked Janet’s delicacy, her imagination, her inbred refinement. As Janet stole a glance at Tim, he was still looking at Fanny with a smile, the full meaning of which it was not quite easy to interpret.

“I suppose all gentlemen like that sort of thing,” thought she, struck with the *pose* which Fanny had assumed, her pretty art in showing off her rings and bracelets, the bewitching society-smile which brought out her dimples as she spoke to Tim.

With all her admirable sense, Miss Lucas was not above the little harmless coquetries common to nearly

all young girls ; but Janet, in her extreme simplicity, was unequal to any thing of the sort. She never could *pose*, or try in any way to shine. The gray-haired hidalgo by her side exhausted himself by his devotions to her, but she was merely civil in return. She had no talent for little or great hypocrisies : as she felt, she looked ; and the hidalgo's lip assumed a cynical curl.

The music now struck up. Notes of terror thundered forth from the organ, that king of instruments, then died away to the still small voice, —

“ And his name shall be called Counsellor, the mighty God, the Prince of peace.”

The audience were thrilled and subdued. Fanny's glittering fan was quiet, and she forgot her *pose*. Mr. Braxton sat like a statue. Janet's face was rapt as if she gazed into heaven. At this supreme moment, Mr. Poliedro, bored by the music, and not listening in the least to the words, leaned forward with half-tender politeness, and whispered to Janet, —

“ Do you find good that soprano, mees? Has she that happiness to please you?”

It was like a galvanic shock. Janet turned, and stared at the man. Please *her*? What sacrilege! At the sudden movement, one of the violets dropped out of her hair ; and Mr. Poliedro, picking it up, resumed with an exquisite bow and smile, —

“ Ah, mees! You will give me this leetle flower? How I shall delight on it!”

Janet deigned no reply, but, assuming an inflexibly upright posture, glared sternly at the stage.

There was an odd glint in Tim's eye, for the by-

play had been seen by him without his moving his head. A smile wavered over Mr. Poliedro's wine-flushed face, and he remained henceforth discreetly silent. He had never seen a young lady less charming than this cold, stiff Miss Vail; yet none the less he employed himself, during the rest of the performance, in building Spanish castles with her money: unfortunately his own money, if he ever had any, was quite gone. Janet, lost in the music, forgot that the man existed. At the close of the evening, it was a shock to her to pass out from the lights, and the throbbing sympathy which had made that vast crowd like one man, into the cold December midnight where drunken men were jostling one another on the pavement, and singing snatches of song. Instinctively she shrank away from Mr. Poliedro, and clung to Mr. Braxton.

"O Tim!" said she, "this is a perfectly awful change for a lunatic like me!"

"Wake up! wake up!" whispered he, giving her a sly pinch, which recalled her to the proprieties.

She drew back then, and rejoined Mr. Poliedro; but she saw by the quick flame that leaped up to that gentleman's black eyes, that she had given offence.

It all passed in an instant, however, and he was his polished self again; but Janet, still a little daft, felt a wave of subtle odor in the air, and thought of Rappicini's daughter, who seemed to be connected in some way with an ever-present Mephistopheles. Upon this she fell into curious reflections as to the cause of her having gone up to Tim involuntarily a moment ago.

"I think I felt then as a piece of steel must feel when it is drawn toward a magnet," thought she;

“ and it frightens me a little, for I had no idea what I was going to do, and I may do the same thing again just as unconsciously. I think it was the music that made me forget.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AUNT ROSSY.

JANET firmly resolved not to go out again with Mr. Poliedro : but that sagacious “individdle” spared her the pain of refusing ; for, though he came to the house formally at stated intervals, he never gave her another invitation. In itself, this was a great relief : still it subjected her to endless persecution from her father, in which Tim had a full share. Tim was the cause of Mr. Poliedro’s coolness, — Tim, the eaves-dropper, spy, hanger-on, fortune-hunter, wretch, miscreant, knave. There was no villanous noun or adjective that Mr. Vail would have grudged his brother-in-law if he could have called it to mind. He informed Mr. Poliedro that Mr. Braxton was “a poor crack-brained fellow, who had always had an eye to his daughter’s money.” He did not mention that Janet was also far gone in lunacy ; though he fully believed it, and actually set Lavinia Briggs, a former servant, to spy upon her comings and goings. As this absurdity amused Lavinia, however, and she duly reported it to Janet, her guardianship did not strike the family as very alarming.

The winter passed monotonously, without an outbreak. Janet had never been able to resume fully her

old relations with Mr. Braxton. She watched for his coming, and counted the hours he spent in the house as the only bright spots in her dull days: yet when he came, she was not quite at ease.

He knew now of Mr. Phenix's engagement, for she had told him long ago; but why had he listened in such scrupulous silence, as if the subject were too sacred to be breathed upon? Could he possibly consider her a disappointed, woe-begone maiden? Was it of Mr. Phenix he was thinking sometimes, when he sat and looked at her so fixedly? Tim was a conservative fellow, with deeply rooted ideas.

She knew she seemed changed to him; for he said sometimes, with a grave look, "It is all right between us, isn't it, Janey? You are quite the same that you were?"

It was not strange, perhaps, that her variable manner puzzled him: it was something she did not understand, herself, and she might have answered him truthfully, —

"It is not I who play the part,
But a shy spirit in my heart."

Cousin Brenda's consoling motto, "This also will pass away," had no meaning for Janet. It seemed to her that life would always go on as it was going now. Her father would never be any better or any worse; inefficient servants would continue to come and go; the domestic life would remain trying and uncomfortable, with backgammon interspersed. Fanny Lucas — good Fanny! she *was* glad for her — would forever march triumphantly upward, while she herself would forever

moil and toil in the valley. Fanny's meed was honor, while Janet was secretly despised, so she thought: for the world would never understand her motives unless she made them as clear as the artist who wrote under his picture, "This is a man;" and she, less obliging than the artist, could never stoop to explain.

As for Tim, his admiration for Fanny seemed to be at the same stand-still with every thing else: it neither increased nor diminished, so far as one might judge. Did he doubt her regard, or why was their engagement deferred to the "distant future"?

But there was one compensation for this eternal sameness. Aunt Rossy would always lie in that white bed, smiling like an angel, and reporting daily news from heaven. As a spiritual refuge, she was more than cousin Brenda had ever been; and brave and weary Janet came home every day from that brown cottage, feeling that "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world!" What though she *was* dwindling into a mere nobody? Nobodies have their place, their use; and who was Janet Keith, that she should complain of her limitations?

She would have chosen work that was "worth while," but it had not been given: her work was to devote herself to her mother and the children. No one else could do for them what she was doing; and, though they by no means appreciated the sacrifice she was making, she would not turn aside from that strait and narrow way. And, after all, how thickly it was strewn with flowers! How much affection she was gaining beyond what she had known before! almost enough to fill the unoccupied spaces of her very craving heart.

She accepted with a glad sort of pain aunt Rossy's statement, —

“I do believe, Jenny, that Timothy is as fond of you as if you were his own sister.”

Well, if this were so, surely it ought to satisfy her! She had never held, and probably could never hold, the first place in any human heart; but what of that? There is one Friend who cares for all alike: there is no room for jealousy in our heavenly Father's love.

This was what Janet thought and felt in her best moments, when the children were not too cross, and life did not press on all sides like a burden too hard to be borne.

So, on the whole, Fanny Lucas need not have looked down on her with such kindly pity. There is a blessedness in duty done, that is at once greater and less than happiness; and of this blessedness Janet's heart was in general full to overflowing.

One afternoon in May she went out with a ball of twine to fasten the vines, which had begun their summer travels up the pillars. She had just heard, through cousin Brenda, of the marriage of Mr. Phenix, and was longing to tell Tim. It was nearly time for him to drop in on his way home from the city; and presently, with a quickened beating of the heart, she heard his step coming up the walk.

“Good-evening, Janey. Let me help you.” Her hands trembled so that the ball fell from her fingers, and rolled upon the door-stone. He picked it up, and restored it to her.

“Tim,” said she, without waiting to draw breath, “you remember Mr. Phenix? He is married.”

Absorbed in the effort of speaking the long-ignored name, she did not think how her agitation of manner must strike Tim; indeed, was not aware that her lips trembled, and her face was startlingly pale.

“Married? Ah! Come, let us leave this business, and go into the house now,” said he, putting his arm about her, and leading her along to the story-room.

The tenderness of his manner stung her to the quick.

“O Tim! you think this news has upset me! I might have known you would think so; in fact, I was afraid you would! That was the very thing that agitated me, — the fear that you would think” —

“I don’t, and won’t, and sha’n’t think any thing you prefer I shouldn’t,” said he, stroking her hair with caressing tenderness.

“But, Tim, it wasn’t as you thought about — about Mr. Phenix. I knew and expected this was coming, and I’m glad it’s all over,” said she, her face glowing now with shame; “and I’ve been wanting to explain, and convince you of your mistake: but it was so hard to talk about it!”

“Yes, Janey, I know.”

It was almost more than she could bear, that inexpressibly kind and compassionate gaze. With delicate tact he had turned his face a little aside, yet she could read it all too well.

“Tim,” said she in desperation at this undeserved pity, “you made a mistake at the islands. I didn’t care as you thought I did.”

“I am glad of that. He was not worthy of you, Janey.”

The tone was still unwontedly gentle, as if her words had made but slight impression. Old beliefs and old prejudices died hard with Tim, and Janet's excited appearance belied her words. He was bent more upon soothing her just now, than upon listening to what she had to say. Yet he would recall the conversation by and by, and ponder upon it: like Sir Isaac Newton, he had "a power of pondering."

Aunt Rossy had required a great deal of care that spring. The neighbors said to one another, meaning no harm, that "she would live to wear poor Mr. Braxton all out;" and aunt Rossy had thought of this once or twice herself, the heaven-absorbed saint! She dwelt too far above the world to feel much of its petty cares, and looked upon people less as human beings than as future angels: yet sometimes it did occur to her that Timothy looked rather worn, as if his nights of imperfect sleep were telling upon his superb health.

"Nobody can lift me as he can, and perhaps for that reason I tax him too much: I think this summer I will depend more upon our Chinaman," she confided to Janet.

But the very next day, Mr. Braxton, Mrs. Vail, and Janet were summoned in haste to her bedside: she had been attacked with hemorrhage of the lungs. The doctor himself was astonished, and frankly admitted that though he had long known her life "hung upon a thread," he had never suspected it was "that kind of a thread." He had thought she might linger for years. But the dear woman was dying. An hour or two before she passed away, she joyfully announced that she saw the shining city, and the glorified ones.

“It is light all the way. The Lord is with me, and I am not afraid,” she said.

At that time she could not see the friends who stood about her bed; but afterward her sight returned, and the heavenly vision faded.

“It’s beautiful where I’m going,” she whispered in Tim’s ear; “but I shall never forget my boy, never, never! If it is permitted, I will be near you sometimes, Timothy, — near to do you good.”

And again to Mrs. Vail, in wonder at her tears, “Life is hard for you, Harriet; but don’t weep. I see the light: it is coming, coming!”

“Something to me, auntie, something to me,” urged Janet, her ear close to the faintly-moving lips.

“Dear one, I trust in God, and so must you,” said aunt Rossy brokenly, — the last words she ever spoke.

And then the glory enfolded her again, and she was borne away by waiting angels to her heavenly rest. Or so the friends believed, who saw the transfiguration of her dying face; but to some, — even to her sainted pastor, — Mrs. Prentiss’s vision was only a beautiful, baseless dream.

Miss Harlow and Mrs. Bangs discussed it two days afterward at Quinnebasset.

“Do you hold to such things, Brendy?” asked Mrs. Bangs with her apron at her eyes.

“I cannot say,” replied Miss Harlow, looking straight before her with clasped hands. “It is comforting to think the veil *may* be rent just before death, and the spiritual sight opened; but it is a point we cannot be clear about, for the condition of the brain” —

“Well, I’m clear about it, and I don’t want to hear

it laid to the brain ! Ain't the blessed Scriptures full of just such visions ? and ain't a holy woman like aunt Rossy just the one to see 'em ? ”

“ I'm ashamed of shedding a tear for her, poor lamb. But I do feel to pity Mr. Braxton. I know he'll mourn like a mother that's lost a child. ”

Tim did not know, till aunt Rossy was gone, how **c**losely their two lives had been interwoven. He could **n**ot remember the time, even as a small boy, when he **h**ad not felt a care of her : for years she had leaned on him, and of late had leaned heavily. His feeling for her had always been tender and protective ; and now that she had embarked at last upon “ that soundless, sail-less, solemn sea,” where his care could not follow, something seemed gone out of his life ; and he wandered about aimlessly, for a few days, with a lost look on his face.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A STRANGE JOURNEY.

ON the morning before the burial, Janet was in the sacred back parlor of the brown cottage, disposing flowers about the room. Mr. Braxton stood by the window watching her. In the gray half-lights that prevailed he looked pale, almost ill.

Janet had put away all the bottles and glasses and other painful reminders; but the little lever-clock still stood on the stand beside the bed, surrounded by flowers.

“It seems to belong there,” said she; “though doesn’t the ticking sound sharp and unnatural, Tim? as if the heart were quite gone out of it. I suppose the poor thing has lost all interest in reporting the time, now that its mistress has ceased to listen or care.”

“May I come in?” asked a clear, metallic young voice; and Fanny Lucas entered, fresh from a morning walk, her little blonde curls straying across her forehead, and her pretty mouth curved to a reasonable degree of sadness.

“Dear aunt Rossy! I came in just a moment on my way to school, for one last look,” said she, approaching the bed, and gazing for a while in silence at

the lovely calm face pressed, with its cheek upon its hand, against the pillow.

“Dear aunt Rossy!” she repeated, and, bending, kissed the marble brow.

“Yet she did not love her so very much,” mused Janet.

Mr. Braxton came and stood beside Fanny. “The very clay she has left looks happy,” said he in a whisper, touching the white hair softly.

“Yes, Mr. Braxton; but how strange to think she has no longer any lot or part in this world, that she is as completely gone out of it as Abraham or Paul! And whither?”

He did not answer; but, taking a sprig of heliotrope from Janet’s hand, laid it reverently on the still breast. He was thinking, —

“We need not ask. Wherever she is gone, she enjoys

‘That perfect presence of His face,
Which we for want of words call heaven.’”

Janet also was silent; but her thoughts, like Fanny’s, were dwelling upon the strangeness of aunt Rossy’s first absence from that room.

“No speech or message will ever reach her where she is gone. Day before yesterday a whisper was enough. If you only looked at her, she answered with her eyes. But now this awful silence; the pale lips death-sealed, the kind eyes death-quenched! Farewell, dear spirit: this last refining touch has made your once familiar face strange. No one can talk with you now but the angels.”

This revery of Janet's was somewhat rudely broken in upon by Fanny, whose quick eyes had taken in every article in the room, and who now exclaimed, —

“O Jenny dear, you won't have those flowers! Please don't have them here!”

“Why not?”

“Oh! they are not so much used now. — Do you think they are, Mr. Braxton?”

Tim looked blank. Perhaps it was the first time he had ever thought of fashion in connection with funerals.

“At any rate, you mustn't have flowers about the casket,” said Fanny, with the air of mistress of ceremonies; and Janet scorned herself because she cared.

“Auntie loved flowers,” she replied.

“Oh, well! a sheaf of wheat is customary. Now do have wheat. — You see to that, won't you, Mr. Braxton,” was her parting injunction.

“Tim doesn't see how she dictates to me, and her ways don't annoy him in the least,” thought Janet, scorning herself again for feeling relieved at the excellent girl's departure.

Mr. Braxton was still standing by the bed, talking in a low tone as if to himself. Janet caught the words, “We were not half good enough to you while you were hers, auntie;” and she moved still farther away, busying herself about the room.

“Was it possible,” she queried, “that Tim could reproach himself, after all these years of kindness and care?”

Yes, no doubt he could. There were a few lapses of memory for even him to regret, a few careless

words ; and naturally they all came back to him now like so many wilful sins. He was haggard with nights of watching. Janet wished he would go and lie down : she did not believe he had slept six hours for a week.

“ Janey, sit down here and talk with me,” said he, leading her along to the sofa. “ What am I to do ? ”

“ Do ? ”

“ Yes : you may wonder at it ; but positively, though auntie has been an invalid so long, I have never made any plans for a future without her. I have never looked forward to her leaving me.”

“ It will be very lonely for you here with only Choo-foo,” returned Janet hesitatingly ; not sure she was saying the right thing, for perhaps it had not once occurred to him to stay here.

“ Yes : one can’t look for companionship in Choo-foo,” he replied, his eyes roving wistfully about the room.

“ Still, this is home to me, and I should dread to leave it for a boarding-house, Janey. That would make me feel like such a stranger in the world.”

“ Not if you could find a place like Mrs. Satterlee’s,” exclaimed Janet, whose memories of Quinnebasset were growing more rose-colored every day.

He did not answer. His eyes were resting fondly on his beloved fernery, and presently came back to aunt Rossy’s white bed strewn with flowers.

Janet thought she must say more ; for it was seldom that he talked of himself so much as this, and she wished to show him that she was interested.

“ By and by it will seem less lonely,” she ventured.

“ Yes,” replied he, arousing himself, “ I suppose so.

At any rate, it is all right; and I am thankful dear auntie is at rest. I was only speculating a little, thinking aloud."

"Keep on thinking aloud, then. I wish I could help you, Tim. I wish you would ever come to me for sympathy as I always come to you," said she with such a warm glow in her face that he pressed her hand gratefully. "But you are so strong that you seem to bear every thing without the need of friends."

She would not on any account have urged his confidence; still, if there was any thing he would like to tell her of his future plans, she was ready now to listen. She almost wished he would speak Fanny Lucas's name, that she might say how bright Fanny could make his home by and by, if he should ever wish her to share it with him. She trusted she could do Fanny justice, even if she did find her sometimes annoying. It touched her to have him speak in that dispirited tone as if no one cared for him very much. Truly Tim was the last man in the world who had any need to be alone.

But, whether he would have confided in her or not, there was no time for it now. Before he could utter a word, Cynthia, Mrs. Vail's kitchen-maid, tapped at the door, and announced that Miss Janet's father had sent for her to come home instantly.

"What new freak is this? I thought he was in the city," said Janet, hurrying away without her gloves or the basket in which she had brought the flowers.

It was very trying to suffer daily from Mr. Vail's vagaries, yet be unable to report any one especial act which proved him downright mad, and in need of being "taken care of."

This morning he had left his business, and come home to confer with his daughter about something : she never learned what ; for, in his indignation at her absence, he quite forgot his errand, and did nothing but upbraid her for her “indelicacy” in going to see Mr. Braxton. She must promise him never to set foot again in Tim’s house as long as she lived.

Two years ago this would have intimidated Janet ; but now she said, meeting his eye bravely, “Father, I must attend aunt Rossy’s funeral this afternoon, and I am sure you will not forbid that.”

For the first time in her recollection, he listened in silence, — yes, absolute silence, with a compassionate expression, as if her mind were going or gone ; and a moment after he took up his hat, and left the house. This was unaccountable. Mrs. Vail, pale with vague dread, gazed at her daughter ; but neither she nor Janet liked to put the thought in words, that Papa Vail’s conduct was ominous.

The hour for the funeral arrived, and he did not appear. Mrs. Prentiss’s remains were followed to their last repose by all her friends except her niece’s husband, Rufus Vail ; and his absence was remarked upon as “singular.”

Singular enough, Mr. Braxton thought, to demand attention ; and he set two policemen to watch the house alternately, to the great relief of his sister, who was looking now for “something desperate.”

For nearly twenty-four hours Mr. Vail was not seen ; but at eleven o’clock next morning, — an hour after Tim, with a re-assuring word, had left his sister and Janet, — he came home quietly enough, as if just returned from business in the city.

By a strange fatality the policeman had been seized, about five minutes before this, with a sudden illness, and had gone into a druggist's near by for medicine: consequently Mr. Vail entered his own house unobserved.

Mrs. Vail and Janet were sewing.

"Hattie," said he with a suave smile, "I have a little business that takes me to Pennsylvania this afternoon, to Mauch Chunk; and I may as well keep on to Tamaqua while I'm about it, and call on the Severances; that is, if I get time. Wouldn't you like to go with me?—No, stop, I'd better take Janet, for the Severances will be wanting to see her; though, as I said, I may go there, and I may not."

Nothing could exceed this urbanity. Mother and daughter exchanged frightened glances: it was hardly in human nature to help it.

"Rufus," began Mrs. Vail timidly.

But Janet hastened to say in an even tone, "Thank you, papa. How kind of you to think of me! But I hardly believe I ought to go now. I've nothing new to wear, and you know the Severances are so very elegant!"

"Nothing to wear? You, the best-dressed girl in the city! That's *no* excuse!"

He was evidently curbing himself by a strong effort. "Oh! if Tim were only here!" thought both the helpless women; but he was in New York by this time.

"Now, Papa Vail!" exclaimed his wife, in the pleading manner which was especially exasperating to him, had she but known it,—"now, Papa Vail, I don't

see how I can spare daughter a single day. Only think how long she's been away from me!"

Mr. Vail compressed his lips; and Janet saw that the veins in his forehead were swelling, — always a bad sign. What could she do, she and her poor little mother, against an iron despot like this? Opposition was not only useless but dangerous, and what had become of the policeman she did not know.

"Papa," said she, springing up with alacrity: "would you really like me to go? And can I possibly have time to get ready?"

The dark look gave place to a smile, with the sudden transition so often observed in the insane.

"That's a good girl. Yes, you have just twenty minutes," taking out his watch. "I'll speak to Crawford to be around with the horses."

(The days of Payson had been numbered long ago, and the new man Crawford was the tenth within a year.)

"Don't fret, little mother," said Janet, as they were left alone. "Remember aunt Rossy's last words: 'I trust in God, and so must you.'"

It was a brave attempt at serenity, but the young girl's mind was surging with doubt and fear.

"You see, don't you, I *must* go unless that policeman gets back to stop it? Watch the window, mamma. Papa won't hurt me if I'm quiet, and seem to yield; but if either of us should go out to find that policeman, or speak to the neighbors" —

Her voice was husky, and she could not help clenching her hands.

"Don't you know where *any* of the policemen live, daughter? Wouldn't Cynthia know?"

Cynthia was a fresh importation from New Jersey, and the idea of her knowing where anybody lived was absurd.

"But she does know the telegraph-office," said Janet, brightening. "Now we must get word to Tim! Here's a gleam of hope, mother. I can tell him to follow us: he'll be only one train behind."

Mrs. Vail seemed fairly stupefied by her daughter's presence of mind. Janet had scribbled a despatch in pencil, and sent Cynthia with it before her father returned from his conference with the coachman.

"Follow us to Mauch Chunk. One o'clock train. Then to Tamaqua.

"JANET VAIL."

In her haste she used the old name. "He will understand from this that something desperate has happened, and will be sure to follow on."

Mr. Vail was in his chamber now, packing his valise.

"O daughter, it is too terrible! Can't we get some help from Crawford? Tell him to drive somewhere! Tell him to do something!"

"No, mother, what could Crawford do?—Oh! *where* is that policeman?—Crawford hardly knows enough to manage the horses. There's no man anywhere this side of New York that I can think of now,—even if we dared leave the house,—who *could* help us. So let's be quiet!" said Janet, taking the little quivering, hindering woman in her arms, and laying her forcibly down upon the lounge. She was as frightened as her mother. She had an impulse to break away from all restraint, rush out, and scream. But the mansion was far removed from neighbors, and, as she had said, all

the men she could think of were away at their business. It would not do, it would not do. Presence of mind, apparent confidence in her father, was all that would save her in this emergency. She decided not to change her dress,—a plain stone-colored cashmere, suitable for travelling: she took her mother's purse, and all the money that could be found in the house, packed a portmanteau, and let her mother help by crushing into it a new silk dress, together with a wet toothbrush; but Mrs. Vail must be doing something, and ruining a gown was far better than falling into hysterics, and exasperating her husband in his present state of mind.

Then, commending herself to God, Janet set forth upon her wild and mysterious journey.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE DISGUISE.

MR. BRAXTON'S habitual carelessness served him well for once. He was on his way up town, and would not have seen Janet's despatch for two hours, if he had not forgotten an important paper, and hurried back for it, just in season to meet the messenger at his office-door.

"Follow us to Mauch Chunk. One o'clock train. Thence to Tamaqua.

"JANET VAIL."

"The wretch is abducting her! Where are those policemen? It's a mercy I got the despatch," thought he; though what could be done he did not know.

One cannot run after a locomotive; one cannot snatch a daughter away from her father on board a railroad-train, on the plea that the father is "nervous." What signifies a little nervousness more or less, when a man's paper is good at the banks for two or three millions?

But wait: the Pennsylvania and New-Jersey cars were not gone yet. Mr. Vail would take Annex as far as Jersey City; and, thanks to his habit of over-punctuality, he had hurried Janet to the station long before

the train was due. There were fifty minutes yet; time enough — for what?

Tim's thoughts flew. He was not a shrewd man, in the popular sense of the term; he had never played a double game in his life: but a dire strait like this seems almost to create new powers.

"Could I change my looks in some way?" thought he with sudden inspiration. "Hold! there's Jack Flint: he is in his room now; I'll borrow one of his theatrical costumes, and go in disguise."

Jack was the young music-teacher next door, — a hare-brained fellow, whom Tim befriended and scolded by turns. He had a weakness for parlor theatricals, with a furtive longing for the life of an actor. Possibly, among his "stage property," something might be found not too absurd for use.

When Mr. Braxton had made known to Jack his necessities, the volatile youth danced about him in glee, eager to transform him into a pirate, a Shaker, or even a Sister of Charity; but Tim stopped him, and would not listen to nonsense. "All he wanted," he said, "was a short coat of some sort, a wide-brimmed hat, and perhaps a pair of spectacles.

"There's not a second to lose, Jack: just make me as unlike myself as possible, but not conspicuous. Do it in five minutes, and I'm your friend forever."

"Take me with you, Mr. Braxton. The Vails don't know me, and I honestly *am* good in an emergency," pleaded the youth, tipping over a trunk as he spoke, and unearthing all its hoarded treasures of masks, ermine-tipped cloaks, tinsel, and trumpery. He would have gone to the ends of the earth to oblige this good

friend, and it seemed to him moreover that his help was really needed now. Mr. Braxton was a capital architect, and not wanting in brains; but as an amateur performer in private theatricals, what was he good for? He certainly hadn't guile enough to be trusted out of sight.

"Why, Braxton, you're not up to this sort of thing! Do let me go."

"Well, come on, then, but keep at a safe distance. I suppose we shall fall in with them at Jersey City," said Tim, slipping out of Jack's deft hands, and striding off the moment the word was given, "All serene."

Jack followed in raptures. The man just ahead might possibly remind one of Timothy Braxton in height and breadth of shoulders: but there the resemblance ceased; for this person wore a blue cut-away coat, green goggles, a soft slouched hat drawn low over the eyes, grayish whiskers lighter than his hair, and sported a gun. He had the air of a weak-eyed engineer going out to hunt, or possibly a muscular college professor: only the rakish tip of his hat was suggestive of jollity rather than learning.

Arrived at Liberty Street, he was the first to enter the car; and before he chose his seat,—a middle one on the shady side,—he took occasion to regard his own person critically in the oblong mirror near the door, rubbing his hands as he did so, and saying to himself approvingly,—

"An ugly fellow; probably from Texas: never saw him before."

When the cars reached Jersey City, he watched the passengers filing in,—a lady with a bird-cage and

two flower-pots; a heated old gentleman, wiping his brows; Jack Flint with a newspaper, — where did Jack come from? a mother leading a pair of toddling twins; a few schoolgirls with picnic-baskets.

Behind this slow cavalcade, — yes, at last! — a light-haired, wiry gentleman, with restless, excited eyes; pushing before him, though she seemed self-poised enough to walk alone, a pensive young girl, Janet.

Mr. Braxton could not be said to be taken by surprise: still, for a moment the ticket in his hand shook a little. How could he be sure his disguise was absolutely perfect? And Rufus Vail's eyes, wilder than usual, looked sharp enough to penetrate a stone wall.

But the shrewd merchant, with all his quickness, had never been good at recognizing faces, — a gift which seems to be quite independent of other perceptions. His eyes wandered everywhere, and, as usual, saw every thing; but he was only looking for a seat. Janet, just in advance, kept turning her head this way and that, evidently in search of some one. "Poor child, if it were only possible to signal to her!"

Up to this time Tim had had no definite plan of action. Janet must be rescued, though precisely how was not clear: there would be *some* way opened for her out of the Red Sea.

Mr. Vail was still patrolling for a seat, unwilling to take any but the choicest, which were already surcharged with twin-babies, picnic-baskets, and flower-pots.

Mr. Braxton arose politely, and waved his hand toward Janet.

The motion was simple enough; but there was some-

thing in the turn of his wrist, and in his impressive attitude, that arrested the glance of the expectant girl. She knew him instantly, as he had hoped; and her face grew luminous. She half extended her own hand, but quickly withdrew it; and there was no further sign of recognition, for Tim had retired behind his goggles, with the grave, unfathomable expression of a highly developed frog.

At the same time he moved forward into the aisle, and signified by a bow that Mr. Vail and his companion were welcome to his seat.

Mr. Vail accepted the courtesy with a cool nod, as if a lone tourist could have no choice but to give place to a gentleman of distinction accompanied by a lady; but he seemed uneasy till the gun and powder-pouch were removed.

After that he proceeded, with a consequential air, to place in the rack his own overcoat and umbrella, and Janet's elegant India shawl.

"Now sit down and be quiet. I didn't sleep a wink last night, — not a wink; and I must have a nap," he muttered, as if his daughter were in league with the unwilling Morpheus to prevent it.

Meanwhile Mr. Braxton had quietly stepped across the aisle, and sandwiched himself between a very stout old woman and several parcels; but fortunately both woman and parcels were of a transitory nature, and vanished at the next station, leaving him with the sole monopoly of the seat.

Mr. Vail, trying in vain to go to sleep, made a note of this. He saw that the weak-eyed gentleman had lost nothing by one act of politeness, and it occurred to him that he might be induced to try another.

“Sir,” said he, speaking across the aisle in a voice like “low and muttering summer-thunder,” “sir, it is of the highest importance that I should get a nap.”

Tim leaned forward, wondering what the man meant. Did he take him for a long-haired psychologist, roaming the country with the quintessence of poppy-juice on the ends of his fingers? Did he suppose he mesmerized people to give them “naps”? Nothing of the sort. Mr. Vail soon explained civilly enough. All he wanted was a little more room, a place to lay his head, and the nap would come of itself. In short, would the stranger be good enough to exchange seats?

Mr. Braxton was good enough, moving out of the seat with surprising alacrity.

“That confounded gun, sir!”

Bowing politely, Tim hastened to plant it in a corner under the oblong mirror, and then returned to place himself beside Janet. Mr. Vail took the seat he had vacated, — the only double one now left in the car, — without a word of thanks either; but this Mr. Braxton did not so much mind, as he had all he could do to prevent himself from thanking Mr. Vail.

Common civility might have allowed him now to exchange glances with the lady by his side: but this was rendered difficult by reason of the goggles; moreover, the lady instantly turned her head, ignoring good manners, and looked out of the window.

Mr. Vail had assumed an attitude highly favorable to repose, and grimly awaited the desired “nap.” It did not come. His small blue eyes opened and shut defiantly, but remained unduly bright, dry, and restless.

Tim pitied as he watched him ; thinking how once a poor millionaire, with a bee in his bonnet, had died, leaving money to found a “nervine asylum” for other poor wretches with similar bees ; wondering if the asylum had ever been founded, and wishing Rufus Vail had been consigned to it long ago. Idle wish ! Rufus Vail would go at large till his family were worn out with fear and dread : there was a tough spot in his bewildered, much-abused brain.

What a change had come over Janet since her return to Brooklyn ! Her bright color had faded somewhat, she had lost a little of the old sparkle and fun, and there were blue shadows under her eyes. Just now Tim suspected that she was struggling with tears, her face still turned toward the window. Finally, from Mr. Vail’s regular breathing, it really seemed that he was asleep ; and upon this hint Tim spoke, —

“Janey !”

The word was low, hardly distinguishable to his own ears above the rattle of the machinery ; but the sleeper aroused and glared across the aisle. Had he heard the whisper ? Hardly possible : still, it was not the part of prudence to repeat it. Tim bit his lips behind the false mustache ; and Janet, who had turned her face toward him, made a deep study of her gloves.

Presently, when quiet had again fallen, Tim drew out of his pocket-book, in a nonchalant manner, a slip of blank paper, and busied himself with scribbling a memorandum. Surely any traveller might do this. It read, —

“For Heaven’s sake, Janey, what is going on ? What can I do for you ?”

Lo! Mr. Vail, or "Argus Panoptes," as Tim mentally dubbed him, was again on the alert. Not a motion of the pencil had escaped him. Mr. Braxton returned the memorandum to his pocket-book, and bided his time.

"Argus," apparently satisfied that all was right, threw a newspaper over his thousand eyes; and Tim seized the opportunity to thrust the written paper into his companion's hand.

Not a moment too soon. Before her fingers could fairly close upon it, "Argus" uncovered his head, gathered himself up, and approached her. Wretched child! In the words of the fairy-tale, she might have said, —

"Who, then, died with fear but I?"

Of course she expected nothing less than a seizure of the precious paper. And what was on it? What had Tim dared write? Mr. Braxton was equally terrified, and called himself mentally a "raving idiot." To be sure, Mr. Vail looked as amiable as his peculiar cast of features would allow; but what meant mild weather in such a face? Was it moderating for a storm?

But, to the infinite relief of both culprits, the man merely asked Mr. Braxton if he were going as far as Mauch Chunk, and if he intended to stop at the Mansion House? That was all; with his eyes fixed on Janet, probably to satisfy himself whether she had been crying or not. But she would not turn her head away from the window.

He plied her with endless questions. "Was she comfortable? Was she tired? Did she want the seat he had left? Would she like a glass of water?"

She answered respectfully ; but the scenery was altogether absorbing, and not one scrap of it would she lose.

Baffled, he crept back to his couch, and made another attempt to sleep. Janet, relieved and thankful, was inspired with courage now to read the slip of paper ; and, as “ Panoptes ” had again closed a few of his eyes, she motioned for a pencil.

Tim, though not famous for sleight-of-hand, conveyed it dexterously ; and she wrote under cover of her travelling-wrap, though without abating in the least her intense study of the landscape.

Tim’s goggles shone with admiration. What sly rogues women are, the most artless of them, bless their sharp wits !

The long strain on Mr. Vail’s nerves had given way at last, and he was beyond question sonorously asleep. Tim almost snatched the paper and read, —

“ Father *is* insane. He means to take me to Mauch Chunk, and shut me up. Save me ! Save me ! ”

Janet’s whole frame was quivering now with sobs. Tim seized the pencil, and wrote in a frenzy, —

“ Give full particulars. He can’t shut you up.”

“ But, dear Tim, he says I have shown symptoms of insanity. All because I don’t like Mr. Poliedro, and I — well, he thinks I like you *too* well ! ”

“ So it’s on my account ! I never dreamed you loved me to the verge of distraction, Janey. Go on. *How* can he shut you up ? ”

“ He says, as I am under age, he is my lawful guardian, — think of it, Tim ! — and he can do with me what he chooses.”

“He can’t do it without help.”

“No : Mr. Severance will meet us at Mauch Chunk. He depends on those Severances. Gay, heartless people. You remember them, how they bow to father. They won’t believe he is insane ; and they won’t care what becomes of *me* if they only please him.”

Mr. Braxton’s brows contracted, and he sat lost in thought. Not that he had a moment’s fear of the final result ; but there was much thinking to be done in the premises, and it was high time to begin.

“Dear Tim, draw your hat lower, keep your gloves on. Don’t look at me. Think, but don’t speak. Remember, I trust in God and in you.”

At this last sentence Mr. Braxton’s eyes nearly brimmed over. It brought back too forcibly the little girl who had sat on his knee, in the years gone by, and “told him all her heart.” And she trusted him still, did she? So she had not outgrown those old days as he thought.

No one, to look at the battered individual in goggles, would have suspected that he ever visited in fancy “the green isle of Long Ago,” much less the floating garden of Maybe. But the heart under the blue cut-away coat was youthful and tender still, and throbbing with feeling. As Mr. Braxton grasped the pencil with a side-glance at the sleeping sentinel, he felt a growing power to do and dare.

“Fear nothing, little Janey : I will save you.”

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE GERANIUM-LEAF.

JANET now turned about for the first time, and looked at Mr. Braxton. The radiance of her face surprised him.

“Oh! I knew you would help me,” she ventured to whisper: “I knew, if I could have you here, I was safe.”

He gazed at her as if he would read her soul. “Yes,” said he after a pause, “it is always natural to turn to old friends for help; but if this had happened a year or two ago, you would not have thought of me, but of — some one else.”

It was hardly kind of Tim: but he could not help saying it; for Janet’s precise state of feeling toward Mr. Phenix had always puzzled him, and this was a favorable moment to set his doubts forever at rest.

“O Tim!” said she eagerly, though flushing with shame, “indeed I should no more have thought of Mr. Phenix than of our little Jamie! How could *he* help me, that weak-spirited creature? He has no more courage than a mouse! Oh! won’t you believe me? can’t you believe me? I never, never cared for that man!”

There was no mistaking this. Mr. Braxton’s eyes

shone with a happy light, — obscured, albeit, by the goggles, — while a gratified smile lay effectually hidden behind the spreading mustache. He had quite forgotten the existence of Jack Flint, who was keeping faithful guard, however, over the top of a railway novel. Mr. Vail was still asleep, but the sudden stopping of the cars might arouse him at any moment. It was necessary therefore that conversation should be wary and limited.

“You see, I couldn’t oppose father any more than I could stop the sun,” went on Janet close to Tim’s ear.

“Perfidious wretch!” muttered he in reply.

“It eases my heart so to speak! O Tim! where was that policeman? And all the way in the carriage papa held me close, for fear I would spring out.”

“Dear little caged bird!”

“I prayed the good Lord to bring you, Tim, — I prayed every minute. But I knew you couldn’t come unless you got the despatch.”

Mr. Braxton smiled at this quaint jumble of faith and common-sense.

“Janey, it was what aunt Rossy would have called a special mercy, that I ever did get it.”

She looked a little over-awed as he related the circumstances.

“How singular, Tim!” Then after a little, “How very singular, Tim! Do you know, I feel clearer every moment that I shall be carried safely through all this, though of course I can’t see how?”

Here the cars stopped a moment. Mr. Vail awoke with eyes aflame.

“Sir,” said he, darting toward Tim, who sat mutely

regarding the bell-rope, — “sir, it’s outrageous, it’s inhuman! I’m half wild for want of sleep; and they’d stop every two miles to let off a passenger if I were dying!”

Tim nodded.

“Do you hear, sir? Do you hear? This is all the way I’ve slept for three months,—yes, sir, for more than three months.”

“Sorry for you,” replied Tim in strange guttural tones; for, in addition to his weak eyes, he seemed afflicted with a loss of the palate, or else was tonguetied; at any rate, something ailed the unfortunate man’s vocal organs.

As he spoke he arose to give up his place to Mr. Vail. “No no: keep your seat, sir, keep your seat. I’m going back directly to try it again. Did you ever suffer like this, with your brain ready to snap?” he asked; for something in Mr. Braxton’s owl-like solemnity had impressed him from the first, and invited his confidence.

“No, I sleep well: sorry for you!” mumbled Tim, in accents that Jack Flint would have admired.

“Hope I can sleep when we get to the Mansion House. Ever been there, sir?”

Tim bowed compassionately. He was not without pity, even where he had little liking.

“Good beds at the Mansion House. Do you go there, sir?”

Tim bowed again.

“Then we shall meet. My name is Vail, Rufus Vail. You may have heard of me: I’m well known; Rufus Vail, a New-York merchant.”

Tim seemed grateful for this information, and racked his brains for a name to trump up in return. Stop: there were a few of Jack's visiting-cards in the pocket of the cut-away coat. He flourished forth one rather timidly, — "John T. Flint."

Honest, straightforward Timothy Braxton, to what meanness have you descended!

Janet hid a smile of astonishment behind her glove, feeling herself a partner in this imposture, and hoping the recording angel would not lay the sin to Tim's charge.

"Flint? Flint? Live in New York? Any relation to Abraham Flint of the Merchants' Bank?"

Poor Tim answered these and other inquiries at random, thinking, "What a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive!"

But his words were spoken into the air. Rufus Vail had lost the power of listening. His thoughts were confused, disconnected; his eyes roved without ceasing, and he often forgot what he was saying. Mr. Braxton had never seen him like this before.

"My daughter, Mr. Flint. Going with me to my friends in Vermont—I should have said Mauch Chunk."

Mr. Braxton bowed stiffly, as if young ladies, being a necessary evil, must be endured with fortitude.

Mr. Vail now began a quick march up and down the aisle, gesticulating so strangely that the passengers involuntarily turned their heads to watch him.

"I trust he can get to Mauch Chunk without an outbreak," thought Tim; "after that, the deluge."

Yes, after that the deluge. But there was no pre-

dicting how Rufus Vail would behave on meeting Mr. Severance: that "tough spot" in his brain had not given way yet; it might hold out too long; and at best the Severances were mere tools in his hands.

Tim moved uneasily.

"Jack and I can circumvent them all," thought he. "Jack shall take Janey away in the night train, and I will stay behind to see that Rufus is put out of the way of doing further mischief."

This sounded plausible; but suppose Mr. Vail should conceive the idea of locking his daughter into her room? or, worse still, keeping guard before her door all night? Or, in case he did nothing of the sort, and Jack should succeed in making off with Janet, what was to prevent Mr. Vail from following and claiming his daughter?

Why, the police—if there were any police. But could this be easily managed in case Mr. Vail should continue to appear inconveniently sane?

Of course Janet would not be forcibly seized; at all events, not detained for any length of time without legal formalities: still the position might be rendered a trying one. Tim pictured it in its worst possible aspect, and groaned in spirit.

"Fortunately Janey has remarkable nerve; but what an ordeal even for the strongest woman! What an outrage upon her delicacy and self-respect! The fright of itself would be enough to haunt her for years. I can summon aid from New York, but the publicity of it is what I dread for her.

"No, it is best to avoid all scenes. I must nip this thing in the bud. What I lack is the legal right to

defend her. I am not her brother, her uncle, or even her second cousin. If I were only her husband!"

This sudden and unlooked-for suggestion might have come from the bell-rope, judging from the way Mr. Braxton stared at that object. Or perhaps he expected to see the sentence flashing out from the ceiling, as in the days of Belshazzar.

Her husband! The words began to echo from all parts of the car, and ring in his ears, in time to Mr. Vail's quick step up the aisle. Her husband! There was a strange riot in Tim's nerves, a moment ago so calm.

He must speak to Janey. Why? what had he to say? He hardly knew. He wondered himself what he was going to say, very much as we wonder what the weather will be to-morrow, with scarcely any more sense of responsibility.

It was a rule with Tim not to act without reflection. Perhaps he ought to wait now till he knew what he was about, but in that case he might not speak at all. There are times when one *must* be rash!

"Janey," said he, leaning forward in a deferential manner, as if addressing an entire stranger, "I have a short story to tell, though it might fill a volume. I love you."

She looked up bewildered, but his eyes were fixed on Mr. Vail.

"Janey," he repeated presently, "did you hear and understand?" For she was sitting perfectly still, with her face toward the window.

"No."

"Then shall I repeat the remark?"

"No, oh, no! please don't; I can't bear it, Tim."

Mr. Braxton arose at this rebuff, as if he found it unbearable. Next moment, however, he sat down again. It would seem that he had only been looking to see if his gun were safe in the corner.

"All right, Janey. Trust me, I will never say it again. Please consider it as unsaid."

"You are too unearthly good, Tim," exclaimed she in a choked voice. "I don't think people ought to be too good."

The words came very slowly, but he listened for them in patience. She was looking out of the window.

"You pity me because I'm in trouble; but it is too bad: I mean, you are too good. And still it is not true goodness: you ought to consider Fanny."

"Fanny who?"

"Fanny Lucas."

"What has happened to her?"

"Why, you mustn't suppose I'm blind, Tim. You think I never see any thing, but I've seen *that* ever since I came home."

He waited for more light. She went on, the words following one another at a respectful distance, —

"Perhaps — ever so many years ago, Tim, you — might — have spoken to me in this way, and — it wouldn't have been — wrong; but now it is. I can't let you do any thing wrong, just out of pity."

"Ah?"

"Yes, Tim: if I didn't know so well your self-sacrificing nature, if I didn't talk just as I do, the time would come when you — when you would be very sorry!"

“Would it? Well, I am very sorry now, but it’s all owing to your ‘talking just as you do.’ You’re talking Greek, Janey!”

However, as Tim had a smattering of Greek, it is highly probable that he guessed at her meaning: at all events, his voice had taken on a different tone; it was not so intensely calm as a moment ago.

“Why ought I to think of Fanny Lucas to-day any more than usual? She hasn’t entered my head since yesterday.”

“Tim, do you really, truly mean that?”

“Why, I can’t say positively. I believe, on the whole, it was day before yesterday. But, Janey, this is no time to discuss trifles. What I want to know is, *why* you ‘can’t bear’ to hear me say I love you? There’s the point.”

“Oh! I *can* bear it,” replied she, looking down at her folded hands with a demure expression which would have been irresistibly funny to Jack Flint if he had understood it, and which set Tim’s tongue to running wild again.

“Then you won’t mind my repeating it, perhaps.”

And he did so with additions and interpolations and marginal notes; all rather confused, but Janet was his sole audience, and neither of them cared what became of the nominative case.

“Hush! he is watching. Tell him I know the Severances.”

“Papa,” said Janet sweetly as her father paused to glare at her, “Mr. Flint knows the Severances.”

“How did you find out? Did you ask him?” returned Mr. Vail gruffly.

He was preparing a lecture upon undue familiarity with strangers; but that would wait: he waved his hand now, and passed on.

"Janey," said Tim, when he was out of hearing again, "will you listen to reason?"

As if he, a man in love, were prepared to utter it!

"Tell me," gazing upward at the ventilator, as if the conversation were growing wearisome, "could you, can you, trust your future in my hands? Have you entire faith in me?"

"Faith in you, Tim? How can you ask after all I've been saying? Haven't I always known there was nobody like you?"

"Very well," returned the young man, surveying his boots critically, as if compliments like this were beneath his notice: "marry me to-morrow!"

"Do you stop at Mauch Chunk, did you say?" demanded a sharp voice at the back of his neck.

Mr. Braxton sprang as if his gun had gone off. Mr. Vail must have approached stealthily: did that mean that he had been listening?

But Tim's "yes" was clear enough; that is, considering his impaired powers of speech. And immediately after this he arose, bowed to Mr. Vail and daughter, and betook himself to the smoking-car to hold a conference with the quick-witted, thoroughly interested Jack Flint, having given him a signal a minute before. Jack knew a dozen people on the train intimately, and many others by sight.

"Remember the Rev. Harvey Pope? He's with us; going to stop at Mauch Chunk over Sunday. No need of a license: he'll be willing to risk the fine for a man

like you," said Jack in ecstasies at the slightest hint of a wayside marriage.

Arrived at Mauch Chunk, the suave and elegant Mr. Severance was waiting at the station; and Mr. Braxton got no further speech with Janet, for her father cut him dead as they met on the platform. Not that Rufus Vail had any definite suspicions of the purblind, tongue-tied sportsman; but he was furious with Janet for holding so much speech with him, and meant to teach her a lesson.

The hotel was somewhat crowded; and Janet waited in the parlor with Mr. Severance, while her father found fault with the clerk concerning their rooms.

"Beg pardon, miss, but did you drop this?" asked a strange young gentleman, coming up with an officious bow to present a handkerchief which Janet knew was not hers.

She gave the stranger a swift glance, and, suspecting immediately that he was Jack Flint, accepted the handkerchief, and slipped it into her reticule. It contained a twisted note; and as soon as she had reached her room, and her father had actually locked her in, she opened the note, which was without address or signature, and read, —

"I have heard you say your heart is set on Vassar. Very well: you shall go there all the same. This which I ask of you need make no difference in our lives. The world will not know of it: we will consider that it belongs to the second-future tense.

"I hereby solemnly promise not to remind you of it for the space of one year, unless you grant me permission.

"I enclose a geranium-leaf. If I see it in your hair or your collar, I will be ready for something decisive. Shall it be after dinner, when the cigars are lighted?"

“What a wonderful person Tim is! How easy and reasonable he makes it all seem!” thought Janet, sitting down to admire him; for she had not recovered from the surprise of finding he did not care for Fanny Lucas. It was so delicious to despise herself for that foolish mistake, that she could not set her mind yet to consider what Tim really expected her to do.

A marriage in the “second-future tense”? Probably to prevent her being “shut up.” She had ceased to feel apprehensive in that regard since his promise to “save her;” but was this the way and the only way he could save her?

She had destroyed the note; but the geranium-leaf lay in her lap, fresh and fragrant, cut from a plant down-stairs a few minutes ago, no doubt. She looked at it, and smoothed its curled edges with her finger: it was a leaf of destiny for her, for Tim.

Dinner would be served at seven. She had half an hour to dress, half an hour to decide. The fate of two human beings hanging upon such a little breath of time! Why it was fearful, positively fearful! Or rather, it would be, if Tim were anybody else but Tim. Ah, that made all the difference!

Would she sit here half an hour balancing such a question about any other young man? No, nor half a minute! She would go on to Tamaqua with her father and Mr. Severance, and take the risks.

What risks? What harm could they or anybody else do her? The world was so rose-colored just now that she laughed at all danger.

She might wear the geranium, yes, possibly she might: but it would be because Tim advised it, and she

had such faith in Tim's advice; *not* because she was afraid!

She might wear the geranium, she was not sure yet. She was by no means ready for a real, settled-down, sober marriage, "at her time of life," as cousin Brenda would say; but Tim did not mean that. Oh, far from it! He wished her to go to Vassar: he had proposed it, and would make the way clear. Why, to be sure, even Papa Vail could not interfere with *Tim's wife*!

The last two words startled and thrilled her. She rushed across the room, pale and flushed by turns. Marriage was surely a solemn thing. One ought to have time to weigh it fully: one ought to be engaged for a great many years.

Tim must reconsider his advice. He was not infallible; and there must be, after all, some other way than this.

No, she would not wear the geranium-leaf.



"She pinned the geranium leaf into her collar." — PAGE 343.

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CHAPTER XL.

CONCLUSION.

SHE pinned the geranium-leaf into her collar, and went down to dinner.

There she sat between her father and Mr. Severance ; trying in vain to listen to the latter's fine speeches, for at some distance down the hall, at another table, sat the man with green goggles. Was he too far away to discern the fateful leaf ?

Strange she should tremble so when it was only Tim ! The marriage, too, was only in the second-future tense, a year away at least.

She ate so slowly, ordering and re-ordering her dishes with such caprice, that her father was only restrained by the presence of Mr. Severance from stamping his foot and sending her from the table. But she saw nothing of this, or of the significant glances which the two gentleman exchanged.

"Papa," said she at last, looking up innocently from a pyramid of ice-cream, "I'm afraid I've kept you waiting. Just take me to the ladies' parlor now, and let me look over a book of engravings I saw there, while you and Mr. Severance enjoy your cigars."

This proposition struck Mr. Severance as quite sane,

but her father had told him she had "lucid intervals." Mr. Vail would have preferred to lock her into her room again, but allowed Mr. Severance to overrule him and escort her to the parlor, having first satisfied himself that the green gloom of the goggles no longer pervaded any part of the house.

"Still I have serious apprehensions. We mustn't leave her long, or there is no knowing what she may do," said Mr. Vail, shaking his head over his cigar.

He had been perfectly "lucid" himself, this singular man, from the first moment of meeting his admiring old friend. It may be, if that "eavesdropper" and "meddler," Timothy Braxton, had not crossed his path, he might actually have succeeded in convincing others as well as Mr. Severance that Janet needed "shutting up." The tottering reason steadies itself wonderfully sometimes, when the motive for self-control is sufficiently strong; and Rufus Vail, cunning and crafty as ever, had set his heart on doing this thing.

His "serious apprehensions" proved prophetic. Of course Mr. Braxton, without his hideous disguise, the Rev. Mr. Pope, and the helper Jack Flint, were in waiting in a private room; and, while the two friends discussed Janet's "case" on the piazza, an important event was taking place in the deep recess of a window overhead. Mr. Flint acted as groomsman, trying to remember that this was not a parlor theatrical, and that nothing was required of him but to hold his peace and imagine himself at a funeral.

Janet stood white and still. It was the most solemn moment of her life, yet she had no misgivings. It

could not be wrong, even in this wild haste, to marry Tim. What matters an engagement, long or short, when it must sooner or later end like this? What signifies time to two people who have really belonged to each other all their lives?

They were in the heart of the anthracite-coal regions, in a spot celebrated for its wild and picturesque scenery; but Janet could never afterwards recall a single feature of the landscape, except the distant view of the Blue Mountains. This she somehow dwelt upon, like one in a dream; and as the clergyman said at the close of the ceremony, which he felt obliged to make as brief as possible, "God bless you, my dear!" she looked far away at those violet peaks; and they seemed to echo the words, "God bless you, my dear!"

"Yes," she repeated softly to herself, "yes, He will bless me, I know."

And then Mr. Flint helped her on with her bonnet and shawl, and greeted her as "Mrs. Braxton;" and Tim's heart sang within him as he succeeded in escorting her down a back staircase and handing her into a waiting carriage beside the invaluable Jack.

"Tell your mother what we have done, Janey; and tell her, too, that a crisis is at hand, and I have put a physician on the watch. I shall not see you till something is settled definitely about Papa Vail."

There was no time for sentiment. He could only add, as the driver gathered up the reins, "Take good care of this little girl, Jack; and tell her mother she needs petting. Don't forget what a nervous strain she has had, and there's another long journey before

her. — Good-by, Janey! — Now, coachman, drive for your life.”

It was a unique bridal trip, with the bridegroom left out. If it had been foretold Janet that she would ever do this thing, she would not have believed it. What! two sober young people like Tim and herself make a farce of the most sacred of all ties, and then run away from each other with hardly a word! She wondered she could endure such an irregular proceeding; but the more she thought it over the happier she grew, — happy in spite of the knowledge that Tim was left behind to engage in a very uncertain conflict with her father. But here her ignorance stood her in good stead: what would be done, she did not know; she trusted it all to Tim.

Mrs. Vail, in spite of her brother's despatch, “All is well,” had wrought herself up to a state of agonizing suspense, and, when her daughter came next morning, received her like one from the dead. Mr. Flint's entreaties that the girl should be allowed to sleep were quite superfluous: she had not answered half a dozen questions before she fell into a heavy slumber on the lounge, and did not awake till afternoon.

Even then she had not the courage to tell her mother the strange news that her childish ambition had been gratified at last, and she was now “a Braxton.” Tim must tell it when he came.

He returned next day, trying his best to look grief-stricken, as he reported that “poor Rufus was at last taken care of.” But he withheld the harrowing particulars, and so will I.

No other result could have been anticipated than the

total overthrow of Mr. Vail's reason as soon as he learned that his daughter was beyond the reach of his power. Thwarted in this last scheme, he gave up all effort at self-control, and from incipient insanity passed suddenly to raving madness.

The "alienist" physician at the "retreat" pronounced the case hopeless, but Mr. Severance had wished Mr. Braxton to assure Mrs. Vail that "physicians did sometimes err;" and the tender-hearted wife, after sobbing out her first grief, consoled herself with the poetical hope that somehow and somewhere and sometime dear Rufie would come back to her in the old likeness of twenty years ago.

It was a sad affair; but, if I am going to tell the whole truth, I must say it was not half as sad as it had been before. It was a beautiful day in May; and Tim was surprised to see what a cheery look the house could wear when one was not dreading a certain foot-fall on the gravel path, a well-known shadow in the doorway. He could not say it to Hattie; but he believed the sun was going to shine upon the Vail family now, as it never could have shone again if Papa Vail had not "gone to his own place."

Janet's greeting had not been especially affectionate. "Is this the gentleman in goggles?" was really all she had said; and then she had gone and stood blushing by the mantle. But Tim let her have her way. When he was leaving the room, Mrs. Vail said pleadingly, "Brother, do stay a little longer," and he replied coolly, —

"Yes, I'll hang up my coat in the hall-closet if you don't object. It's lonely at my house now; and, besides, I naturally prefer to stay where my wife is!"

This paved the way for an explanation, followed by a tableau, with Tim in the middle and Hattie and Janet on either side. Mrs. Vail was in raptures, but the bridegroom suggested that she ought rather to mourn. Instead of their all living together cosily, she must prepare herself to part with Janet.

"You understand, I suppose, that she is going to Vassar? It is so nominated in the bond, Hattie. She is free as air," said Tim, removing his arm from Janet.

She studied the carpet persistently, but I am afraid there was a sparkle of wicked triumph in Tim's eyes as he saw that she did not stir a hair's-breadth from his side.

I wish I might say that Janet entered Vassar. She was young, and it was a great pity to neglect the opportunity when Mr. Braxton was so manifestly ready to give her up. She always declared it would have been different if aunt Rossy had lived. But what if his home *was* empty? She need not have watched his face to see if it was sad: she need not have felt so much responsibility about her mother. Mrs. Vail and her brother could have lived on without her, and if she had been a sensible girl she would have gone to school.

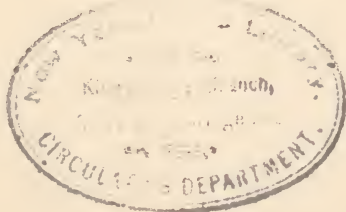
But Janet had always been blind to her own interests, and she was weak enough now to listen to Tim when he perfidiously suggested that she might study at home. He had promised never to remind her of the little episode at Mauch Chunk, and he never did; but as Miss Harlow remarked, forgetting her own weakness, "Oh, folly! any one could have foretold from the first how it would turn out."

The "Russian ice-palace" blossomed into a beautiful home; and the first guests to enter it were Judge and Mrs. Davenport of Quinnebasset, followed not long after by Mrs. Bangs.

"Now, Jinny, — I mean Mrs. Braxton, — if you'll keep me I'd be pleased to stay till you can do better. I always did enjoy the religious privileges of Brooklyn, and I like to live with young folks that are as happy as you and Mr. Braxton. It's my opinion," added the minister's widow piously, but with cautious reservation, "that *some* matches are made in heaven."

"Then you didn't know, Mrs. Bangs, that my husband married me for my money? and that Mr. Madison Tukey comes forward now, and says I have a little fortune in my own right?"

"I might have known you would discover my motives! Your penetration always exceeded every thing, Janey," said Mr. Braxton with an arch smile that quite "carried" Mrs. Bangs "away." "So I may as well confess I've been a fortune-hunter all my life; for I resolved years ago I would never marry anybody unless I could marry a certain 'poor heiress' whose name is Janet."



NO. 10 1956

